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The Changing Nature of Electoral Politics in India

Vishnukant A. Baswade

Prof., Shankarrao Chavan College, Pethwadaj Tal. Kandhar Dist. Nanded

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Address for correspondence:

Vishnukant A. Baswade
Prof., Shankarrao Chavan
College, Pethwadaj Tal.
Kandhar Dist. Nanded
Email:
baswadevishnu94@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The nature of electoral politics in India has undergone significant transformation since independence, reflecting shifts in socio-economic structures, technological advancements, regional aspirations, and democratic participation. This study examines the evolution of India's electoral landscape from the dominance of the Congress system and agrarian reforms to the era of coalition politics, economic liberalization, and digital campaigning. The paper highlights how caste, religion, class, youth aspirations, and regional identities continue to shape voting behavior and political mobilization. It also explores the growing influence of social media, data-driven political communication, and misinformation in redefining electoral engagement within the contemporary public sphere. Furthermore, the study analyzes the role of institutions such as the Election Commission of India, campaign finance mechanisms, coalition governance, and media narratives in sustaining democratic processes. The paper argues that while Indian democracy has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, challenges relating to inclusivity, transparency, accountability, political corruption, and equitable representation remain central concerns. By examining historical developments alongside contemporary electoral trends, the study provides insights into the changing dynamics of democratic participation and the future trajectory of Indian electoral politics.

Keywords: Indian Democracy, Electoral Politics, Political Communication, Social Media, Coalition Politics, Election Commission, Youth Participation, Caste Politics, Regionalism, Liberalization, Political Mobilization, Democratic Governance

INTRODUCTION:

Emergence and Evolution of the Electoral Landscape

Amidst the boisterous cacophony of our contemporary existence, the journey of democratic evolution is seldom contemplated. In India, the emergence and evolution of the electoral landscape—still in flux—is also a narrative of continuity and resilience. Several countries that once inspired its democratic ambitions subsequently abandoned democratic pluralism. India avoided this fate, although periods of autocratic rule reinforced its constitutional integrity rather than eroding it. Milestones—such as the founding elections, the “Green Revolution” breakthroughs, the liberalization policies, the national emergency, and the rise of a pan-Indian party of substantial alternative appeal—mark the trajectory of its electoral polity. A sweep of the historical panorama reveals a gradually and incrementally adjusted span of engagement and disenchantment, and a succession of game-changes that established new rules of the game and provided the key indicators of the issues to be addressed. In retrospect, perhaps the most remarkable innovation has been the pervasive involvement in mass electoral politics of the large land-owning agrarian classes, whose incumbency, under either the Indian National Congress or the Janata Party, had compelled the country to undertake the two decades of intensive land reforms in the first place.



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It is no accident that, notwithstanding its dismemberment and fragmentation, the Congress retained its hold on half the states throughout the long cycle of development, or that both national political power and a majority of state legislatures are held, since 2014, by a party originally born to represent and coalesce the agrarian-led opposition to the Congress while eschewing “development” as a manifestation of that opposition, or that the design of policy, during the liberalization episode, shifted back to favouring agriculture.

In the beginning, the foundational event of the trajectory's first segment was a narrowly-margin triumph for the Congress in the inaugural general elections, paving the way for the consolidation of a new regime of governance at independence. The overwhelming victory of 1957 initiated the cadre and institutionalization era of development politics, enabling the state-led transformation of an economy crippled by colonial rule. The assassination of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964 triggered the first a-term succession crisis, accelerating the agrarian conflict toward its definitive collapse and marking the birth of an arid series of quasi-transition cycles in the rest of the political spectrum. Following the 1967 elections, the state of the economy began to constrain development policy that had previously dominated government. The ensuing decade witnessed the emergence of a multitude of counterpoint politics, contestable by-combination politics, and a radical cease-to-political-activity crisis. A second historical high point of the trajectory arrived with the still-elusive literacy reform of the secondary segment (Sinha, 2016).

1. From Independence to the Green Revolution: Foundations and Shifts

Constitutional beginnings, agrarian reform, mobilization of the masses, and the politics of development drive early electoral behavior. Restructuring demand and supply catalyze the Green Revolution; the Congress Party's populism collides with alternative coalitions of regional parties and the Left.

The Constitution establishes a bourgeois-mass democracy in technicolor. Periodic elections, scheduled by the Election Commission of India, project the trappings of democracy across India. The president and vice president, members of the two houses of Parliament, state governors, members of state legislative assemblies and councils, members of the Union Public Service Commission, and members of state Public Service Commissions are elected. Political parties become the gateways to high political office, and the connections that flow through these gatekeepers determine who will command the resources of the

Indian state. Yet, despite India's tryst with constitutional democracy, many social scientists were skeptical about the durable stability of the political system. Access to regular elections was not being complemented by a simultaneous deepening of development or democratization. Political rights existed, but political wrangling had not gone beyond elite-in-Delhi intrigues.

With the commitment to agrarian reform, policies geared to the mobilization of the masses become a dominant theme in the politics of the first three decades. The collapse of the monsoon in 1965–66 and the consequent food crisis create a search for alternatives to the Green Revolution. Across the northwestern plains, the scarcity of jobs and the inability of high-density creating recurrent drought have increased the political salience of job creation. The partial success of the 1967 elections in breaking the dominance of the Congress Party is matched by the emergence of regional parties. The occupation of the subcontinent by foreign powers evokes a desire for dominance at home; subnationalism seeks political expression in the demand for the formation of states on a linguistic basis. The growing discontent and capacity for mobilization within Indian society find expression through the Left in protest against the increasing polarization of wealth through a class-based politics. The outcome of the 1971 elections reaffirms the dominance of Congress, but its high-pitched, populist rhetoric fails to conceal the reality of erosion in its political base.

2. The Liberalization Era and its Electoral Echoes

In the wake of the 1991 economic reforms, the liberalizing Indian economy began to witness market-oriented economic and social policies and policies of privatization associated with these policy measures. Economic liberalization generated debates on the necessity of policy measures to support the poor, policy measures which were considered critical for sustaining policies of economic reform and privatization. These discussions were frequently presented in political platforms in pursuance of votes, and the 1991 elections generated considerable expectations on the economic policies of the government. The expectation combined with the post-1991' policies of reforms and privatization define the overall political strategies of the major political parties and a mutual understanding of the expectations of the electorate towards the political parties.

Technological Infusion and the New Public Sphere

In recent decades, technology has fundamentally reshaped the political landscape.

Communication technologies have changed how citizens interact with one another, shape their views, and engage with formal political institutions. Political communication today occurs in a vastly different public sphere than in the past. In India, as elsewhere, political parties and candidates must grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by technological change. Messaging Economic Liberalization, new technological capacities for communication and engagement, and the emergence of an intermediary information ecosystem have redefined how individuals receive political information, engage with each other, and develop electoral preferences.

Political messaging has transformed significantly over the last two decades. Candidates no longer speak in uncomplicated slogans delivered at mass rallies. Instead, sophisticated data-seeking algorithms accompany large-scale advertising operations, seeking minute shifts in individual disposition to augment parties' social science insights gathered via survey-based questionnaires. Data-driven targeting now guides message design, channel selection, advertising expenditures, and social media use. As campaigns adopt the rhythm of continuous data gathering, audits assess persuasion impacts and forecast electoral outcomes. Political rhetoric has shifted accordingly. Issues have not vanished from the campaign.

Political developments in the country have rapidly unfolded within a reconfigured contemporary state. A networked information economy has emerged. Information flows along highly unequal, deeply textured channels—both formal and informal—through intermediaries operating in various media formats. The information landscape encompasses both mass media and vast arrays of politically relevant social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Citizens enter the public arena first through raw engagement with these platforms. Algorithmic amplification subsequently activates virality and mobilizes broader audiences. Information flows even after formal electoral campaigning ceases. The political message uncovered by campaigns rests at the core of these developments (Udupa et al., 2019).

1. Data, Digital Campaigns, and the Language of Persuasion

Political campaigns in India are increasingly shaped by digitally driven political communications that deploy language to persuade voters about policy priorities and political futures. Campaign analysis illustrates three overlapping dimensions: data describing voters, constructed communication reaching them, and the forms that construct discourse itself. Campaigns collect data about

individual citizens from digital fingerprints, choreographing forms of communication to match the analytics. Simultaneously, the campaign's broader communicative architecture constrains the kinds of messages that can be crafted.

Such targeting offers the possibility of designing messages that resonate on issues salient for pre-selected citizens. Data-driven campaign communications emerge amid a broader evolution of public life within the digitally enabled "new public sphere." Individual citizens use mobile devices not only to engage with public debates but also to articulate themselves—seeking to persuade others and help frame the public agenda. In response, campaigns now emphasize a communicative "channel" dimension—infrastructure that enables public articulation—as critical to their strategic vision.

A second analytic track explores the rhetorical modalities that constitute political campaigning. Far from representing the conventional transactional model of "mind" or electoral choice, political campaigning operates through two distinct channels. Campaigns thus highlight the additional dimension of virtual rather than direct engagement (Udupa et al., 2019). Worldviews and identities characterize the overall communicative "architecture" along which campaigns circulate; individual issues figure at the "policy" layer (Sharma et al., 2021). Campaigns interact iteratively rather than sequentially, with messages and responses reverberating across layers without a predefined order of traversal; this feedback facilitates tuning and calibration of the persuasion process.

2. Social Media, Information Ecology, and Misinformation

Communication technology shapes political engagement on personal levels, but it also rapidly transforms the very nature and ecology of political communication, across both public and private spheres. This metamorphosis transforms how political issues are framed, allows citizens to participate in various public interactions and enables information about political parties and candidates to percolate through diverse, informal networks—yet also provides powerful new means of exploiting and manipulating public information in ways that can mislead. In India's contemporary multitiered political system, algorithmically amplified and sanitised disinformation circulates widely among a politically thirsty electorate eager for concise, entertaining commentary.

India has witnessed an extraordinary increase in social media usage since liberalisation. In 1990, fewer than 5 in 100 Indians owned a phone; by 2015, 95 in 100 possessed a mobile device, mainly

smartphones (Udapa et al., 2019). With increasingly accurate and low-cost handsets and affordable mobile data plans (Sharma et al., 2021), the number of social media users jumped from 25 million in 2010 to over 400 million by 2020. Mobile data consumption quintupled between 2016 and 2019 alone.

Conversational public spheres have blossomed on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, bolstered by wide distribution of memes, images and videos. With limited time, exposure and socialisation, citizens often grasp issues through reproductions produced and circulated by knowledgeable others.

Electorate as Agent: Demography, Identity, and Mobilization

Politics is all about who gets what, when, and how, and most of the time, the “who” is a collection of interests, needs, wants, and values organized around an identity of some sort. When the choices available to the electorate are only about who represents these interests, needs, wants, and values, it is common to assert that it has become, in some important sense, only still identity politics.

In a democratic society, the electorate is composed of individuals who act on their beliefs and aspirations to promote and protect their self-interests through the group identities they choose to spend their precious electoral resources trying to defend, re-define, or, as the case may be, dismantle. A pattern of voting emerges rather effortlessly when the group identities in this sense can offer these sets of beliefs and aspirations. In the case of Indian electoral politics, it is groups based on caste, communities of redefined castes, and socio-religious communities that have been foundational in modern history, but have also been increasingly carried by a new, youthful electorate focused on general issues such as education, unemployment, job opportunities, and overall development that call the need for a different understanding of political participation.

Indian society is increasingly being more discussed and expressed in terms of layers of caste, class, religion, language, and region that are seen as mutually reinforcing and therefore entangled, which also reinforces the multilayered identity that constitutes the Indian electorate. Political parties and governments have to meaningfully engage with those interconnected segments and intersectional loyalties to remain relevant and centrally important (Borooah & tagat, 2015).

1. Caste, Religion, and Community Entanglements in Voting

The caste-class-religion binary continues to shape social mobilization in Indian electoral politics.

Among lower castes and classes, voting en masse for specific parties reflects both class and caste concerns within a different framework. The aspirational voting observed among youth across communities beckons attention, and development policy has emerged as a core agenda cutting across caste and religious boundaries. These simultaneous caste-class-religion patterns, however, do not imply the absence of community concerned policies and mobilization. Lower castes and non-Hindus continue to face systemic structural exclusion in the nation and state.

From its conception, caste occupies a constitutionally delineated space in electoral politics (Borooah & tagat, 2015). Caste, community, and other structural inequalities continue to loom large, both across and within groups (Sinha, 2016). Social identities lay the foundation of democratic political representation and are strategically leveraged. Recognition of aspirational discourse and agendas framing rural concerns for the upper caste—as contrasted with the overwhelmingly urban contour of the overall electorate—calls for understanding both norm and aspiration-based patterns within the electoral realm.

2. Youth, Aspirations, and the Politics of Representation

The aspiration of educational and economic advancement dominates the contemporary outlook of Indian youth (Martelli & Ari, 2018). Influenced by technological modernization and growing interdependence with global systems, Indian society is rapidly changing. Despite being granted political rights decades ago, the country's 400 million youth under the age of 18 live in a state of relative neglect. Only 8% of the youth population feel the government listens to their issues. Even more desperately, political representation among these groups remains weak; approximately 45% of youngsters believe that youthful leaders understand their needs better than older cohorts. If current governance fails to stimulate opportunities for trade and commerce—a crucial priority for youth—the desire for politics that serves educational progress, equitable diversion of resources, and expansion of wealth generation may mobilize large numbers to elect alternative representatives. Since access to either basic or higher education plays a major role in economic advancement and formation of political consciousness about community empowerment, a considerable faction also longs for the facility of knowledge, including primary and higher schooling, along with means to continue postgraduate studies at home and abroad, as prevailing hindrances characterize current governance (Sinha, 2016).

Institutions, Policy, and the Mechanics of Choice

The mechanical structures supporting the electoral framework govern the state of policy, the workings of government, and the extent of citizen access. The bedrock of the political system remains the institution of universal suffrage—voter registration, candidate nomination, campaigning, polling procedures, and counting and declaration of results are entrusted to a separate, autonomous, constitutional body, the Election Commission of India. The prime minister characterized this Commission, which gained independence in 1973, as the “guardian” of Indian democracy. Subsequent increments of independence were secured through reforms enhancing the powers of the Commission and insulating it from executive discretion. The success of the electoral process—the transfer of power without violence or dispute—partakes of the regional quality of polity; the national electoral sphere extends merely for one-third of the electorate, and local matters remain key determinants. Progressive withering of decision-making at the Centre was registered in 1989 by formation of nine coalition ministries at the Union level, each, as with the following National Democratic Alliance and United Progressive Alliance ministries, commanded not the single-party majority requisite to form government pre-economic liberalization. Coalition politics incrementally replaced dominant-party rule. The maintenance of stability appears, however, to remain secondary, through a similar retrospective, to the challenge of engaging sufficiently across constituent sentiment to secure choice and thus limit the requisite of persuasive accountability in position (Borooah & tagat, 2015).

1. Electoral Commission, Reforms, and the Guardrails

The Election Commission of India was established in 1950 as a constitutional authority operating outside the legislative and executive branches of government. Its mandate includes free and fair elections, updating the electoral rolls, and monitoring campaigns. The commission's independence and non-partisan mandate are vital to uphold electoral integrity. The work of the commission is based on the rights-based framework enshrined in the constitution. Throughout the years, the commission has undergone reforms as part of the democratic process to meet the evolving needs of the polity. In many democracies, electoral administration has gradually acquired greater autonomy, including budgetary independence, independent sources for appointing key personnel, and wide authority over operational matters and the conduct of elections (Dawood, 2016). Several countries have introduced citizens' commissions

and expert bodies to recommend reforms, including in design and operational aspects. India's reform trajectory followed a different path, with incremental changes instituted directly by the commission.

The autonomy and protection of the Election Commission remain inferior in India compared to other Commonwealth countries. Audit, scrutiny, transparency, accountability, and broadness of participation are major issues (Ibrahim ABUBAKAR & Muhammad YAHAYA, 2018). The observance of democratic norms continues to be a challenge. Issues such as majoritarianism, the lack of an inclusive political framework, the weakening of the federal framework, and the increasing perception of bias regarding institutions all pose serious concerns. Political parties use social media to increase awareness regarding elections, voters, and other related information. Besides political parties, many civil societies that understand the need of the hour are also raising awareness for the citizen to get associated with electoral process.

2. Campaign Finance, Transparency, and the Costs of Politics

Ominous clouds loom over the electoral landscape in India. Despite the growth of legally mandated funding transparency, unaccounted fund flows obscure the money trail behind political donations, shady dealings, and covert arrangements where only a few are privy to the details. Proposals seeking to enhance transparency often elicit strong opposition from political parties, stymieing even modest reforms like the introduction of digital tracking for political contributions. Campaign finance reform remains crucial to strengthening democracy, yet politicians habitually postpone any action. General fund discrepancies have recently ranged from ₹1,515 crores to ₹8,406 crores concerning covered political parties. For the ruling party at the time of writing, the difference amounted to nearly ₹3,500 crores. Some forms of media and philanthropy underpin greater accountability than others, and inappropriate messaging can backfire. Prominent media ownership conglomerates can pose a substantial threat to diverse expression and independent reporting. Most often, parties actively crowd out other funders, coupling exclusive messaging with the cooption of outlets, extending pressure to maintain suppressed coverage. Consequently, the influence of political parties and other funding sources oriented toward accountability weaken when the ruling party exceeds the general threshold for broad influence. Ultimately, fundamental escalation calls into question independent processes affording elite political figures and interests more

space to filter public policy, thus extending elements promoting political accountability. Successive electoral mandates have underscored the vision behind the 2002 amendment to the Representation of the People Act, which sought to restore voters' rights to know political party funding sources. In the absence of further reform elements, the goal remains unfulfilled.

Regionalism, Federal Dynamics, and National Narratives

India consists not only of diverse peoples, cultures, and languages but also of varied languages of politics. National narratives intersect with regional articulations, shaping federal arrangements and impacting governance. Regional parties, including Shiv Sena, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Bahujan Samaj Party, Trinamool Congress, and Janta Dal, rise alongside the Congress era of single-party dominance, assuming crucial roles in coalition governments. Regional aspirations stimulate policy debates, such as languages and migration, yet national priorities—including identity, security, and economic growth—maintain resonance in party discourses. Since liberalization, globalization prompts connections to far-off locations, technologies, and constituencies. India's global positioning invokes public conversations about economic development, foreign languages, international linkages, and the articulation of global aspirations at national, state, and local levels (Ahmad Sofi, 2016).

1. Regional Parties, Coalition Governance, and the Centre-States Balance

Just after independence, regional parties emerged to articulate the aspirations of states within a newly independent Indian union. They sought greater autonomy as a bulwark against hegemonic nationalist visions and to protect linguistic and regional identities from the corrosive homogenization of modernity—imperatives that parallel the global rise of regionalism, federalism, and the resurgence of sub-state nationalisms amid globalization (D Shah, 2013).

The world over, state governments have played an increasingly important role. The resolution of national issues, securing independence from the domination of nation-centric political parties, safeguarding region-specific interests, and articulating local aspirations emerged as the principal drivers behind demand for regional parties.

Federalism is an extra-constitutional precept that underscores the interplay between centre-state relations and coalition governments. Many coalesce to prevent the party in power at the Centre from monopolizing state apparatus, if not in the states

where they are located, to bring into force their particular brand of local democracy; secure better financial allocations from the Centre by aggregating regional demands; or bring back into focus issues that concern their constituents after a national or general election by holding mid-term assembly polls (Parag, 2012).

Coalitions forming governments of 15 states and Union Territories (UTs) were classified into single party, electoral, and non-electoral. A party that has won more than 50 per cent of the seats in the Lower House forms a single-party government. A coalition formed by two or more parties that together command more than 50 per cent of seats or a single dominant party and one or more parties that are non-electoral formally or informally, but where the dominant party unilaterally decides allocation of portfolios.

2. National Identity, Globalization, and Strategic Positioning

Independent India emerged from colonial subjugation as a nation defined by the claim to unity in diversity (Chatterji, 2012). Disparity persisted in various forms among India's communities and popular aspirations. Claims for equal rights, representation, and recognition remained, taking divergent social and economic trajectories (Pandey, 2017). These struggles acted out on the political stage in multi-party, free-and-fair elections conducted under universal adult suffrage (Kumar, 2017). Over time, the conduct of elections became the litmus test of the Indian state's commitment to democracy and the esteem with which the populace regarded this system (Sinha, 2016). It also generated rival scripts of belonging that altered how citizens perceived their nation. The narrowing field of actors who might voice popular grievances, reflect proud identities, and champion expected policies opened yet another window to the changing pulse of Indian democracy (Bhargava, 2012).

Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the pre-Independence Congress chose a state-centric, development-oriented, national-unity model of modern nationhood that systematically marginalized erstwhile revolutionaries and champions of religious-based or ethnic-based nationalism. Nehru drew inspiration from the US and Western Europe and favoured state intervention, planning, and rudimentary public provision of education, health, and infrastructure to mitigate large inequalities prevailing at Independence. He thereby created a framework of development in which excursions into sub-nationalism during the late 1960s–early 1970s and the late 1980s–early 1990s became rarely viable (Sinha, 2016). In the North-East, sub-nationalism

reinforced the predominant Nehruvian approach (Bhargava, 1991). The Indian nation persevered through the 1970s despite the two key regional repercussions of the Congress's national experimental approach—the near collapse of East Pakistan, this became Bangladesh, and the secessionist upheaval of mass armed struggle that ensued in Punjab, Kashmir, and Assam (Bhargava, 2012).

The Media, Narrative, and the Rhythm of Elections

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping political dynamics. As political campaigns unfold, they not only inform voters but construct entire narratives around candidates, policies, and parties. These narratives emerge from a complex interplay of individual behaviour, collective performance, the mediums employed, and the institutions that mediate the message. In India, a diverse media ecology produces competing narratives. Television remains central to national elections, melding entertainment and enlightenment. The obsessive analysis surrounding vote counts draws on earlier framing of the pre-election period as a definitive “battle” (Dasgupta, 2017). Grassroots voices and local realities are also represented, echoing street-level perspectives in robust reporting and collegial exchanges.

At the macro level, an electoral cycle comprises three acts: announcement, campaigning, and counting. Each phase brings a distinct tempo, with too much or too little momentum triggering adjustment. The national rhythm is accompanied by local pulses, producing a multi-speed system. The media sets key markers, signalling transitions and deadlines. The spectrum of party affiliation shapes editorial positioning and framing, influencing how parties and policies are perceived. Partisanship and ideological affiliation are highly pronounced, with dedicated media for each stance (Mushtaq & Baig, 2020). Decisive moments are dramatized through intensive package building, augmenting frequency and amplification. Momentum fluctuates, but a widely acknowledged peak beyond which the public no longer engages remains elusive.

1. Newsrooms, Pundits, and the Spectacle of Victory

Pundits, too, have seized on elections as the ultimate journalistic spectacle. Commentators amplify dramatic moves—from party leaps by popular politicians to turncoat hands shaken in hastily arranged press conferences. They play up the showmanship surrounding maiden speeches by first-time candidates, twisting the language of drama into an ostensible analysis of political

signalling. Election coverage has morphed into a public pageant, climaxing in a circus of victory. Yet, deep underneath the sanctuary of Delhi's newsrooms, the tea leaves upturned by political analysts do whisper the pulse of democracy—shrunk as it may be. A swarming vernacular, freed of the shackles of translation, now reigns. Anchors skillfully loop the same khichdi of stock phrases around influencers' assessments. Nights get stretched thin and press-postings, weighed down. Votes bagged by fringe actors in unreachable enclosures. The chase remains as frantic as always; only the needle has shifted deeper—a shift into the local and the peripheral. Urban bypassed, and Gram panchayat premised upon police clearance. Stations in the regions, if not the slums themselves, garlanded with new aerial-mapping coordinates. And Youth, still the top song all and sundries profess seeking; but from beneath the waiting list the stragglers broadly watch—the lone-ball passes, the striker places it short upon yet another long delay. Aspirants, celebrated as the Programme seeks their vision; (Dasgupta, 2017).

The releases, meanwhile, sagging much weightier—a top “flower” each of breakfast, lunch, supper now inches across the horizon a hazy with red gracing dimly-glow yellows trailing-off. The coverage, now more bewildering—the melange solidly clings into old solid still fairly droops. At the upper shore, blown-trickles symmetry begins loosening few squared-facets—nontouches gravitate-topend nowhere. The speculation loosens weight rigor, not thickness; a simplicist yet pertains, mellows still further; the pastellish blue casts more descant still eve of pulse still more weighs; a next, tad-cleft sigh grants clear till extends porthole sights envelop solidly bruises face; succeed decoded messages much nearer; framer-positioned temporal dilates yet worn. No farther than that of.” Hardly glimpses of ‘yours truly’ who, round-the-clock ought knowing ‘beyond-doubt’; sans few streams tails seeks one plead step, discretion brave thither.” Far-lapped black contours, non-eches echoes grit earth long each pulsate down round waxiness still silken.

2. Grassroots Voices and the Echo of Local Realities

A recent exuberant campaign by the prominent Hindi newspaper Dainik Jagran produced topical films depicting rural life featuring multiple languages and dialects in its attempt to innovate in political reporting and invitation to the general public (Sinha, 2016). Still the Gyanvapi mosque controversy dominated the news cycle, reflecting the fading light of the voter and candidate address through the strategic evocation of the local public sphere in the national arena (Borooah & tagat, 2015). Such resonances foreshadow a shift in the

political mandate away from political ambitions finally coalescing around the grand national narrative of development towards grounded reminders of ordinary daily life, its communal echo through the memory of pre-Independence, and local everyday fixtures of night laziness, tea enjoyeth, street corners and gaiety as a segment of a larger repertory, its translate in an exchange of respect, attention, and concern.

Challenges, Contests, and the Future of Indian Democracy

In grappling with the unfolding character of Indian electoral politics, what challenges and contests lie ahead for democracy in India? The quest for inclusive, equitable, participatory, and accountable governance stands as the foremost challenge. Voter-disconnect and disaffection rooted in the unrepresentative nature of political agency, reflected in lower rates of election turnout, citizen involvement, and public trust in authorities, erode further the legitimacy of multiparty electoral procedures and institutions. Collectively foregone, they prompt scepticism over the possibility of attaining either democratic or developmental goals (Sinha, 2007). Youth, fighting flesh-and-blood battles for actual rather than token citizenship, social equality and justice, educational opportunity, and pathways to individual and community dignity, struggle for their rights to be included and represented in the systems and structures from which they seem too often excluded. So too do marginalised and unrecognised groups—dalits, indigenous groups, women and their organisations—situated even more severely on the frontline of exclusion and deprived of voice, freedom, and agency to influence the political domain or their lives. Issues raised by these challenges remain central—as do the pressures each week to take shortcuts to escape the *melée* surrounding them.

Deprivation of identity, being, and challenged survival emerge throughout activism on the ground. Irrespective of region or habitat, young people continue to endure the pangs of invisibility and silence. In varying forms, youth everywhere search for political agency and recognition. The priority remains—how might these aspirations be satisfied? Is it to do with basic needs or attainment of basic rights? Is it that youth wish to reclaim the social contract devolved to a fatherland so as to participate in the constitution of a more profound and meaningful, vital and contemporary resurgence or reanimation of the existing contract? Such remains the schooling and life experience of an extensive strata of the world's youth, particularly in all parts of the periphery, in permanently

hermetically sealed abyevents and otherwise. Respect for community history remains—but agency and becoming seem thwarted. Meaning lies elsewhere. This crisis of becoming articulates with wider phenomena—absence, discontinuities, and a more general fragmentation—or microniching—of personal identity. Parties design and prefigure eligibility for politics. Youth, aspirants, and the continued unrecognised constitute a formidable force of contestation for wider democracy.

1. Inclusivity, Electoral Participation, and the Promise of True Representation

The quandary of inclusive representation remains paramount in contemporary Indian democracy. While the population has burgeoned since independence, political participation has stagnated. Compounding this dilemma, the aspirations of the excluded—the poor, women, young people, and marginalised communities—have undergone seismic transformation. Prized aspirations today include education, employment, and social security. Yet despite the growing economic acumen of politicians, material wants remain glaringly unaddressed by the major political parties.

The inadequacy of representative legitimacy casts grave doubt on the quest for popular sovereignty in India. Socio-economic data underscore the near-total absence of much-needed political engagement. Excluded groups aspire for wide-ranging political and economic change, but their support often gravitates toward parties pledged to some other argue for a more communal outlook. Women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the educationally deprived, and the economically disadvantaged compounds crave recognition of their voice, yet legitimating agencies have remonstrated far less. Absent wider participation by the excluded, hopes for a true representative polity remain bleak (ROY, 2016) (Bajpai, 2019) (Borooah & tagat, 2015)

2. Integrity, Accountability, and the Path Ahead

With the advent of anti-corruption movements in different parts of the country, there has been a renewed focus on maintaining political integrity and transparency, not just during elections but in governing processes as well. Even though India has a wide range of anti-corruption legislations like the Prevention of Corruption Act since 1988 and the Right to Information Act of 2005, political corruption has witnessed unprecedented heights, leading to a serious crisis of integrity (K. Tummala, 2014).

Political corruption consists of various forms such as transactional, constitutional, and political corruption. During the controversial confidence motion in the Parliament in 2008, legislators were openly bought and sold to sustain the coalition

government, marking a nadir in Indian democracy and a peak in political corruption. This mainly relates to the transition from the pre-formation of the coalition era to a coalition period (Chakraborty, 2014).

After gaining independence in 1947, India spelt out the principles of democracy in its Constitution in 1950 and deemed political integrity as the bedrock for smooth functioning of democracy. Over the years, the political process has shown notable changes like forming multi-party coalitions as a routine practice and emergence of several splinter parties.

Conclusion

Democratic politics in India, which began with a truly aspirational vision of universal equality and unmitigated representational capture through adult franchise for all, has entered a space of deliberation with competing exclusive and exclusionary electoral marks—one where transcending local and regional identity is proving harder, still more of caste than of class or any other relevant criterion of mobilisation. This predicament is reflective of wider disjuncture between the politics and polity of aspiration of a large number of voters and an equally large number of political parties competing against each other to satisfy electorates including the peripheries. The tapestry of Indian democracy traversing far and wide, of the electorate as agent—the backdrop—has of late been very far-reaching.

From Gandhi's charisma and moral leadership of the national movement through Nehru's foresighted commitment to socio-cultural and regional pluralism in the ideals for New India to Modi's deft combination of Hindu pride-rounding-back-the-clock-assertion-and-symbolic-inclusive-development, politics at least delivered by the central governments at the behest of the ruling party had soaked far deeper in the souls and aspirations of the masses than any of the other mass mobilising leaders or movements or parties or electoral agendas whose promise far surpassed what elections could deliver. Years of relatively thick sifting systems of listening to the electorate had prepared readers for the greater dreams, imaginings, and anticipations of the masses, preparing ground for nearer more expansive and larger feel of what was drawing upon the masses of the present ecology of political communication.

Those higher leadership imagings perspective opened up within the political arena a very small semi-circle of elites presenting visions and articulating aspirations of a very large mass of contemporary humanity of an astoundingly wider eternity far beyond historical Indian politics

economy present development, urbanisation, national planning capitalistic and medical cooperation and so on, more desperately engaging, instead, with the individual whole universe and redeeming solution-masses of today in the celestial quarters. As compared to the leader-masses relationship whose density and texture of discourse and coordinate cities matters, such phenomena even within the polity-aspiration-space-now widely subverted-survival of such somewhat beyond the-imagination-encounter have become completely negligible.

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