Independent India, 1947–2000

Wendy Singer
emphasized Indian's rights as free citizens and as indebted as the Constitution might have been to existing law, it forged new paths borrowing from other useful texts, including the American Constitution.

This is illustrated in the words of the preamble:

WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual.

Implementing these goals set in motion a flurry of activity to build the institutions and structures of a new state that we will see in future chapters. The obligation of the state to its citizens was to guarantee these human rights. Here too the realities of Partition violence manifested in the language of the Constitution as a fierce adherence to human rights in a multi-religious, diverse society.

But the first concern of the state was defining its territory. While Partition created boundaries in Punjab and Bengal, much was still left to define. Also, the fact of Partition showed the arbitrariness of borders and lines of sovereignty. If the natural contours of India had ever been assumed, this was no longer the case. Immediate challenges, such as war with Pakistan, negotiation with regional rulers, legal wrangling over territory, and the consolidation of states, shaped the actual geographic boundaries of both India and Pakistan. The next chapter takes up the delicate negotiations, intrigue, and military actions required to integrate regional territories into the Indian state.

Consolidating the nation

In the first five years of independence, India had absorbed eight million refugees, completed its Constitution, and held an election of 178 million voters. These were remarkable feats in themselves. But at the same time, India had fought its first war with Pakistan over Kashmir, had integrated 600 other semi-autonomous princely states into its union, and had initiated its First Five Year Plan for economic development.

The process of nation-building accelerated as the decade progressed, particularly in terms of creating Central Government programs and institutions. The Second Five Year Plan, which began in 1957, proved more extensive than the first and emphasized large-scale industrial growth. In addition, Goa, the Portuguese colony on India's west coast acceded to the union, thus fulfilling India's goal of territorial consolidation. In foreign policy India joined the Commonwealth of Nations—a group of former British colonies that continued to work cooperatively—and, at Nehru's instigation, co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement—a strategic grouping of nations, which sought to gain independent influence in a bipolar, Cold War world.

Relations with China had dramatic swings from the peace and trade agreement of 1954, to border tensions throughout the 1950s and India welcoming the Dalai Lama in 1959. The high-stakes relationship with China manifested in 1962 with a Chinese invasion that perpetrated a humiliating military defeat over India's Army.

This chapter focuses on these internal and external challenges to national integration from 1947 to 1964, a period shaped by Nehru's leadership. It will use four examples,

1. the integration of princely states, particularly the contrasting examples of Hyderabad and Kashmir,
2. India's China and Tibet policies, leading up to the war with China,
3. the incorporation of the Portuguese colony of Goa, and
4. regional assertion, in this case, the Communists in Kerala.
KASHMIR AND HYDERABAD

The status of Kashmir remained throughout the twentieth century one of the most divisive problems in South Asia, producing ongoing tension between India and Pakistan. From the perspective of Indian post-independence politics, in addition to relations with Pakistan, several other issues coalesced to perpetuate Kashmir as a crisis—the general process of integrating princely states, Indian ideology of secularism, and India’s China policy.

Even before independence, Indian leaders began negotiating with some 562 states, governed by hereditary rulers, with whom the British had established relations of some degree of autonomy, known as ‘paramourcy.’ From January 1947, the British sent conflicting signals about the future status of these states, sometimes suggesting that they could opt for independence when the British withdrew. However, following the announcement of Partition on 14 June, Lord Mountbatten pursued a policy (based on negotiations with Jawaharlal Nehru) designed to prevent the further Balkanization of India. He called for the princely states to accede to India or Pakistan, depending on their geographic location. Before 15 August, most states had agreed to accession.

As historian Barbara Ramusack writes in The Indian Princes and Their States, “most princes acceded for a variety of reasons including patriotism, the advice of their ministers, the pressure of popular political leaders in their states, and a sense of abandonment by the British” (Ramusack, 2004: 273). From the perspective of the princes, accession followed more than 20 years of direct negotiations with the British about the meaning of their treaty relationships. Princes resisted the concept of ‘paramourcy’ because, while it suggested a kind of autonomy, the British used it to encroach increasingly on the internal affairs of their states. In response to continued pressure from princes for a forum to discuss common concerns, the British inaugurated the Chamber of Princes in 1921, a consultative, advisory body comprised of 120 princes representing 225 states. The Chamber of Princes had limited success either in finding areas of agreement among themselves or in negotiating with the British.

After independence Vallabhbhai Patel, India’s Home Minister, who served as chief negotiator for the government, sought to regularize the government’s relationship with the princely states and integrate them into the new Indian nation. He offered each something called a Standstill Agreement, which granted the princes control over their budgets and properties, and also maintenance stipends, called ‘privy purses,’ but they had to accede to the Indian Government’s three main powers—defence, foreign affairs, and communication. While the concept of a Standstill Agreement appeared to confirm the status quo of partial autonomy that had been established between princes and the British, in reality it became a step toward integration.

Mysore state, for example, established its first Congress Party Government on 24 October 1947 following a period of marches by Congress supporters calling for the end of the Maharaja’s rule. These were ironic or symbolic in that the Maharaja had already agreed in principle to accession. However, in the intervening time, Congress protestors were arrested or driven out beyond the Mysore boundaries. After brief negotiations in October the agreement was made and the Maharaja of Mysore, like so many of his fellow princes, was supported by the government in the form of a privy purse—in his case of 2,600,000 rupees a year. This stipend replaced the stipend the princes had been given by the British Government before independence.

Other states, however, resisted accession. Three of these—Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Kashmir—initially signed Standstill Agreements and all three ultimately joined India through different processes and with different degrees of willingness. Junagadh, a state on the western coast of India with a Muslim ruler and majority Hindu population, initially sought accession to Pakistan. After some initial conflict, however, it ultimately joined India, through a negotiation process that included a plebiscite—a general vote of the population.

Hyderabad and Kashmir proved most contentious and most serious given their size and geography. Hyderabad, a landlocked state completely surrounded by India, covered 82,000 square miles and had a population of about 17 million people. Kashmir on the other hand bordered both India and Pakistan. Although its area was about the same size as Hyderabad, it had only 4 million inhabitants. The story of these two states took very different turns.

Hyderabad’s Muslim ruler, the Nizam, held an ancestral title that dated back to the Mughal Empire, which then controlled most of South Asia. In 1713, the then Governor of Hyderabad, Asaf Jah, attained de facto independence from the Mughal Emperor. By the nineteenth century, Hyderabad continued as a principality with a ruling Muslim elite and a population that was about 87 per cent Hindu. When Winston Churchill visited the state during his tour in the British Army at the turn of the century, he commenced on the bold sense of independence apparent there (Churchill, 1906). It was also diverse, comprising three regions—Telegu-speaking Telangana, Marathi speaking Maharashtra and Kannada speaking Karnataka—but Telangana was the largest.

In 1947 the Nizam hoped to gain complete sovereignty over this diverse and populous state. He hired a British lawyer, Sir Walter Monclon, to negotiate on his behalf; meanwhile he intended to build up his military. On 29 November 1947, Hyderabad concluded a Standstill Agreement with the Indian Government, seeing this as a way to buy time, while he continued to seek independence. Mountbatten (Governor General at the time) reported that it was with ‘very great regret’ to India, that the Nizam did not sign an ‘instrument of accession’ (H. E. H. The Nizam, 1948: 10) [Doc. 5, p. 138].

Plebiscite: A general vote on a specific question or referendum. A plebiscite in the autonomous state of Junagadh made it part of the Indian union, but despite calls for a plebiscite in Kashmir, it never materialized.
However, perhaps due to its ‘great regret,’ India immediately began to undermine Hyderabad’s hope for independence. Within Hyderabad, the Nizam had to contend with internal problems as well. The state Congress organization, with support from outside members of the Indian National Congress, was mobilizing for accession. In addition, concerned Muslim elite had organized against the perceived threat of a Hindu majority, and communists, whose allegiance to Congress vacillated but whose support among some peasants remained strong, consolidated their local base. The peasant movements in British India that led to Zamindari abolition, also started in the 1930s. In Telangana too, peasants mobilized against intermediaries on the land. Particularly from 1939 to 1945, villages established organizations called Sangham that agitated against landlord excesses, such as vetti, a compulsory tax. The Nizam’s government openly supported the landlords and banned the communists who defended, and at times organized, the peasant Sangham.

A militant communal organization – the Iltihab ul Musulmân – further antagonized an already tense situation by enforcing the rule of the establishment. Using its paramilitary wing called the Razakars, the Iltihab ul Musulmân employed force against peasants in the countryside. In Telangana, village men and women formed squads to fight against Razakars as well as landlords. Taken together these armed peasant movements, which incorporated popular resistance to the Nizam, and resistance against Razakars, came to be known as the Telangana Struggle. A key characteristic was the participation of women in armed resistance [Doc. 6, pp. 138–41].

While the Telangana Struggle was not intended as a movement to bring Hyderabad under Indian control, it did indirectly precipitate integration. Because it revealed real fissures in the Hyderabad society, it provided an opening for the Indian Government to take action against the Nizam. Citing the breakdown of law and order in Hyderabad as a cross-border threat, the Indian Government demanded the Nizam take action. As a form of pressure, the Indian Government exercised considerable control over the flow of commerce in and out of Hyderabad State. Parry, this was designed to stop the flow of arms from Karachi; in Pakistan, however, the Nizam claimed that medical and other basic supplies had been cut off as well (Balbo, 1949: 325). In a complaint filed before the United Nations, the State of Hyderabad claimed that India was encroaching on its sovereignty, encouraging internal dissent, and inflicting a damaging economic blockage [Doc. 5, p. 138].

Finally, in September 1948, the Indian Army marched into Hyderabad and the Nizam surrendered in three days. Nehru granted the Nizam the same rights given to other princely states, including retaining a title – Rajpranulok – keeping most of his immense wealth, and gaining a privy purse of five million rupees.

The significance of this process of incorporating Hyderabad lends itself to wide interpretation, both at the time and among historians. As Bipan Chandra et al. describe it, the Indian Government ‘decided to be generous and not punish the Nizam’ (Chandra et al., 1999: 76). However, Ayasha Jalal points out that this was an example of the heavy-handed tactics Nehru used in the aftermath of independence (Jalal, 1995: 46). A contemporary observer, Frank Morais, then editor of the Times of India, similarly said.

Nehru’s treatment of the princes subsequent to divesting them of political power is an illustration of his strength as a strategist and weakness as a tactician. To allow the princes to exercise special political powers, privileges and prerogatives after independence would have been anomalous.

But having integrated them, Morais argued, Nehru went too far in aggregating and disaggregating their states by reorganizing their administration. This simply antagonized them (Morais, 1960: 150).

However, the resolution of the Hyderabad issue, did not address the concerns of Telangana peasants; the Indian Government did not step forward to meet their demands, although the process of gradual land reform did bring some change in the countryside. In fact, the agrarian issues in the region continued to be a source of political conflict. The government, however, instituted some reforms. Beginning in 1950 as a series of reform acts passed in other states, the government sought to distribute agricultural land to tenant cultivators, providing them with the rights of ownership. Most legislation proved limited in effectiveness due to poor wording and ineffective implementation. By 1967, however, elimination of unfair taxes, imposition of effective land ceilings, and prosecution against fragmentation of holdings provided a basis for a more equitable land tenure system [Doc. 7, pp. 141–3]. Although uneven in implementation, these reforms provided a basis for legal expectations that land and livelihood were rights of citizenship. Ongoing agrarian political movements sought to demand the redemption of these rights, although government reports recorded these as property crimes and a law and order problem [Doc. 7, pp. 141–3]. Another consequence of these ongoing movements was securing Telangana, as a region with separate identity within the state’s legal boundaries.

If Hyderabad was a difficult case, Kashmir proved even more contentious. In demographic terms it was the inverse of Hyderabad: here a Hindu ruler governed a state more than 70 per cent Muslim. Another difference was that Kashmir bordered both Pakistan and India, providing a logical case for accession to either. Furthermore, Kashmir remained a strategic issue for both nations on the border not only of each other, but also, of China and Central Asia, which at the time of independence was controlled by the Soviet Union.
At the time of independence, Maharaja Hari Singh sent telegrams to both India and Pakistan seeking Sandsgill Agreements [Doc. 8, p. 143]. Given the position of the state, its telegraph and rail connections remained with Pakistan after independence and it depended on Pakistan for supplies. In an effort to force accession, Pakistan took advantage of its control over commerce (presaging the tactic India used in Hyderabad a year later) blockading the region. At the same time, Pathans, an ethnic group from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, began moving into Kashmir to liberate the people from the Maharaja. Many of the Pathans were equipped with weapons from Pakistan and had the implicit consent if not direction of Pakistan's Army. They also found some support among Muslim peasants in Kashmir.

The political situation within Kashmir, however, was complicated. There was an ongoing democracy movement led by a politician named Sheikh Abdullah, whose organization came to be called the National Conference in 1939. The National Conference had resisted the authority of the Maharaja, but it was also sympathetic to the Indian National Congress, which had a branch in the state. In fact, Sheikh Abdullah was in jail at the time of independence, because he launched a Quit Kashmir movement against the Maharaja in 1946.

As the Pathan irregular army moved toward the Kashmir capital of Srinagar, the Maharaja first appealed to Pakistan to stop them and then sought military aid from India. But India, both for strategic reasons and in accordance with Mountbatten's legal advice, refused to defend the kingdom, unless the Maharaja signed an accession agreement [Doc. 9, pp. 143-4]. Once he did, India immediately began flying soldiers into Srinagar. Militarily, India pushed back the Pathan/Pakistani forces out of Srinagar and out of the heart of Kashmir – the Kashmir valley.

This case too went to the United Nations. India initially registered a complaint under Article 35 of the UN Charter calling for UN assistance in settling the dispute. Some Indian commentators at the time thought this was a tactical mistake, because it implied equal culpability with Pakistan and perhaps equal claim to Kashmir. Indeed, the UN expanded the complaint to include Pakistani accusations that India had committed genocide against Muslims. Ultimately, the UN established a committee to look into the issue, which, after much negotiation with both countries, finally set a ceasefire line in early 1949.

The historiography of this early clash over Kashmir is especially controversial because of its implications for ongoing disputes between India and Pakistan. Writing in 1950 in the Political Science Quarterly, Taralnath Das states boldly 'it became evident that Pakistan was the real invader and the raiders [Pathans] were mere subsidiary forces' (Das, 1950: 2689). Philips Talbot, at about the same time, wrote about the implications the conflict might have on the possibility of holding a plebiscite in Kashmir. According to Talbot, the ongoing conflict made the mechanics of large-scale voting impossible (Talbot, 1949: 332).

While India had set the precedent for using a plebiscite to determine accession in the case Jammu and Kashmir, when Pakistan called for a similar scenario in Kashmir, India resisted. The government claimed that a fair vote could not take place until there was a more stable situation on the ground, meaning that refugees could return and foreigners had left. This raised a number of questions. Who would determine when all non-residents, i.e., Pathans and other Indian or Pakistani nationals had withdrawn and therefore would not try to participate in the vote? Similarly, how would refugees who had fled be able to make their interests known? Finally, should a single referendum determine the position of the whole state or should the vote be carried out on a regional basis, opening the door for some future Partition? These questions took on greater relevance as time passed, given the increased violence and displacement of populations in the region.

While at the time of independence, there was a strong grassroots claim for accession to India, the years of ongoing violence, seemingly to assure that claim, undermined it. Aysha Jalal, in Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia, blames the leaders of Pakistan and India in the 1940s and 1950s for permitting communalism (in South Asia meaning conflict between Hindus and Muslims) to thrive and as a result the interests of the Kashmiris themselves were neglected (Jalal, 1995). As fiction often evokes these images in powerful detail, Salman Rushdie's novel Shalimar the Clown focuses on ordinary Kashmiris caught in the conflict between states and non-state militant activities (Rushdie, 2003).

Kashmir was a potent symbol for both states. In India it represented the nation's commitment to secularism. As the only Muslim majority region to remain within its boundaries, it portrayed India's multicultural diversity and exemplified the secular ideology explicitly articulated by its Prime Minister. Nehru himself came from a Kashmiri family, which had a sense of a Kashmiri culture that included Hindus and Muslims together. For Pakistan, Kashmir embodied the essence of its nationalism. Here was a region where Muslims literally were living under a Hindu king, who made nonmuslem decisions, such as accession, without consulting the people. It underscored the need for a Muslim homeland and characterized Pakistan's sense of its geographic boundaries. Furthermore, in one tradition, the name Pa-leistan was an acronym for Punjabs, Kashmir, Sind, and Baluchistan – the regions intended to comprise the state.

The Kashmir dispute had implications beyond India and Pakistan as well – underscoring its strategic significance. China too claimed a portion of Kashmir as its territory. Therefore, Kashmir entered the story of conflict between India and China.
THE CHINA WAR (1962)

Conflict with China was not inevitable, even before independence, the Indian National Congress had supported China against Western imperialists and also against Japan. Immediately after independence, India embraced China and was one of the first to recognize the new People's Republic in 1950. In fact, on 24 April 1951 India and China signed a significant treaty of mutual cooperation, known as Panchsheel, or Five Principles (Doc. 10, p. 144). When, in accordance with the first principle, the two nations proclaimed mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, they did not specify official borders and boundaries. While there was some dispute over the border created by Sir Arthur McMahon, who had drawn the British boundary in the northeast, these issues were set aside during the negotiations for the Panchsheel Agreement. Nor did India question China's occupation of Tibet, which had begun some years earlier and India gave up any claims to the post-British hold over Tibet. The war with China thus came as somewhat of a surprise to most observers.

Of course, there had been tension on and off over the contours of the border. In 1956 Chinese engineers began building a road across the Aksai Plain, which was later claimed by India. The McMahon line was ascribed to India's territory. The road linked Xinjiang Province in China to Tibet. Not until 1957 did China publish a map of the road and India still had not dispatched official observers until 1958. By then, the dhakos had already won over the claim of land claimed by India had been accomplished and Nehru sent a series of letters to Chou En-lai protesting the incursion. Recently released CIA papers on the subject shows close American scrutiny of these events, reflecting American concerns about the outcome of an escalating dispute. The CIA analysis of the situation suggests China misread Indian intentions, sometimes willfully and sometimes naively ignored early warning signs (United States Government, CIA, Report, 1963).

Aksai lies in the Indian region of Ladakh, a part of Kashmir, compounding the complex implications of a military build up in the region disputed with Pakistan. Furthermore, whatever concerns Nehru had about this area in the northwest were equalled by attention to a military build up of Chinese troops on the eastern border. Indian soldiers faced Chinese soldiers along the border of the North-East Frontier Agency, particularly on a ridge of the Himalayas called Thagla since about 1959 and there had been occasional incursions one way or another across the ridge.

On 8 September 1962, Chinese soldiers attacked an outpost on the Thagla Ridge and then waged a full-scale invasion on 15 October. In the first few encounters, India lost 513 soldiers (including officers) and China captured 50,000 square miles of Indian territory. It took weeks for Indian reinforcements to reach the remote passes in which the fighting took place. India appealed to the United States and Britain for assistance, but on 10 November the Chinese withdrew from all of the territory they had taken in the east.

What remained was Chinese occupation of the Aksai region of Kashmir, leaving open speculation that the eastern conflict was a distraction from the more important Chinese expansion along the Tibetan border in the west. However, Chinese claims to the eastern territory, which later became the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, resurfaced periodically.

Historical accounts of the war portray India as unprepared, though sources suggest the reason for this lack of preparedness. Some blame Nehru's industrial policy that failed to modernize the military. Also both Nehru and the Defence Minister Krishna Menon seemed to miscalculate China's strategic goals (Cohen, 2001: 131; Frankel, 1978: 76). Some also describe Prime Minister Nehru as naive in the face of Chinese expansionist ambitions, blinded by a desire to keep open friendly relations (Khalilani, 1999: 40). Others suggested that Nehru arrogantly refused to negotiate boundaries with China. Along these lines, Neville Maxwell, a political analyst, went further in arguing that India provoked China through the 'Forward Policy' that pushed Indian border patrols closer and closer to the McMahon line - the border that India recognized as the legitimate one (Maxwell, 1970).

However, K. Subrahmanyan, a politician and political thinker, who joined the Ministry of Defence after the China War, reflected on Nehru's performance in less harsh terms. He argued that Nehru had a subtle understanding of China, but chose not to provoke the Chinese directly, because he was looking at a longer-term strategy. On military preparedness, Nehru advocated a strong and gradual build up, which almost had not been complete by the time of the unexpected war. Subrahmanyan dismissed the 'Forward Policy' argument directly and in detail (Subrahmanyan, 1976: 102–130).

The China War spread a wider fear among Indian citizens and encouraged reflection far from the area of conflict. A contemporary issue of the American Saturday Evening Post magazine portrayed women college students at Lady Sri Ram College in Delhi engaging in rifle drills (Sharrod, 1963: 63). The debate over the China War and its causes and influences on Indian foreign policy continued long after the events. An article in the Indian newsweekly Frontline in 2003 directly addressed the continuing influence of the China War on Kashmir policy. A. G. Noorani demonstrated the importance of Aksai Chin to China's control over Tibet and reviewed the historical treaties that presented conflicting versions of the actual boundary, (Noorani, 2003)

A related issue then was China's Tibet policy, which came to concern India as a sizeable Tibetan refugee population crossed the border from 1959 onward. Nehru never condemned China's occupation of Tibet, although some Indian politicians thought he should. Nevertheless, in 1959
Nehru did grant asylum to the Dalai Lama, when he fled Chinese rule to India's border. [Doc. 11, pp. 144-5]. Nehru's speech in Parliament about the rescue of the Dalai Lama met with some opposition from colleagues concerned about the implications this would have on the prevailing 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' (India-China Brothers) policy. (At that time Chinese and Indian relations had been moving toward increased trade and friendship.) After this event, the People's Daily, China's official newspaper, did begin to refer to India as an imperialist power.

Noozam's article in Frontline claims that China's Tibet policy did influence its claims about its border with India. This may also explain why, despite military superiority, China chose not to advance into India: perhaps China was indeed simply consolidating its control in Tibet. Reporting on his interview with Nehru during the China War, the American reporter for The Saturday Evening Post, Robert Sharrow, reflected on the sudden change in atmosphere between late October and November 1962. When they first met, Nehru was determined to defend the nation by fighting the Chinese on the border and he clearly feared further advances into the Indian plain. The nation had mobilized for war—civilians were training to use rifles and women donated gold for the war effort. The relief after 10 November, Sharrow explained, was palpable. Nehru's attitude toward China had returned to normalcy (Sharrow, 1963: 67).

China's acquisition of Aksai Chin changed the map of Kashmir in a small way, but that shift opened up the possibility of dividing Kashmir further. Both the reality and India's perceived weakness encouraged Pakistan to wage war on India again in 1965, although not in the Kashmir region itself. The war focused on the Rann of Kutch (on the west coast of India), which had a border with Sindh Province in Pakistan; it extended to military clashes in Kashmir and Punjab as well. An open question in 1965 was whether China would also join the conflict; however, it did not. Ultimately, the United Nations resolved key border issues attached to the war in a treaty signed at Tashkent. UN intervention in South Asia, mainly by brokering diplomatic agreements, signalled an attempt by the organization to smooth the process of decolonization. One last example, of a post-independence conflict—the forced accession of Goa—shows India's complex position in the world community as a fledgling and embattled democracy on the one hand, and regional superpower, on the other. Here too the UN played a role.

GOA: THE LAST EUROPEAN COLONY?

Unlike Hyderabad and the other princely states, it took until 1960 for India to integrate Goa and finally it did so, using the army. What surprised Nehru and Parliament was the international condemnation for what seemed to them a logical step.

If India's arguments for Kashmir and Hyderabad's accession had to do with prevailing continuities in those states with the Indian society that predicated independence, the logic for the integration of Goa was more convoluted, especially given the striking discontinuities. Goa had been a Portuguese colony for 400 years and maintained a Portuguese administration. The vast differences between political and institutional structures in Goa and those in the rest of India demonstrated the overwhelming influence that European colonialism imposed. Therefore, the integration of Goa served as a lesson in how very different colonial influences shaped the Indian subcontinent.

Beginning in 1947, the government of India set out to negotiate the accession of Goa. India initially perceived Goa, unlike the princely states, as a European colony which, like the provinces, should become absorbed into the Indian state. The anti-colonial logic made sense in a global context. After World War II, when many European powers were divesting of their imperial holdings, Portugal declared its colonies 'overseas provinces' in an effort to maintain control over them. Furthermore, especially following a high profile public meeting by the socialist leader Ram Mohan Lohia in 1946, it seemed that a growing movement against the Portuguese dictator was gaining greater popularity. However, the Portuguese Government did not negotiate and in 1961 the Indian Army marched in to take possession of Goa, easily subduing Portuguese resistance. In two days—18 and 19 December 1961—Indian soldiers marched into the territory from several sides, in an operation called 'Vijay' or victory. Many Goans greeted them with nationalist slogans and with Indian flags, indicating that the invasion was seen—at least at that moment—as liberation.

Nehru was in fact surprised by the international protest that followed. A voice in the United Nations called for an immediate ceasefire. What complicated matters was a political and cultural system in Goa that defied easy integration. While the Indian Government immediately set up an administrative system for Goa, it was based on practices of governing that had been functioning and developing in India over more than a decade, with origins in British law. These new principles of government immediately produced conflict.

Language became an issue and perhaps a metaphor for the larger issue. The Indian legal system imposed on Goa was based on laws written in English and translated, as needed, into Indian languages. Indian civil servants and most jurists functioned in an English milieu. Since Goans were not trained to implement the new government, Indian officials from other states came to facilitate the legal integration. But communication was a serious
obstacle because not only were these government officers seen as outsiders, but they primarily relied on English as a medium of communication, which exacerbated the alienation. Goan judges not only did not know the new laws, but they could not read them. Arun Sinha, a historian of Goa, described the disorientation of liberation. Prices soared, incomes dipped, jobs were lost, rules changed and in the absence of qualified Goans, Indians from other states came to occupy key posts in government' (Sinha, 2002: 37).

Furthermore, there were conflicts within Goa among pro-Portuguese groups and pro-Indian nationalists, but also along lines that did not necessarily coincide with pro-Portuguese resistance, there was tension between Christian and Hindu Goans. The neighbouring states of Karnataka and Maharashtra both placed claims on Goa, based on the linguistic divisions within the territory.

The solution for Nehru was to maintain Goa's independence – defining it as a separate entity under the principle of 'unique identity.' To do so, the Central Government made Goa, along with Damod and Div – nearby islands that were also acquired from Portugal – Union Territories that would be administered and supported financially from New Delhi.

For many Christian, Portuguese-speaking Goans, this unique identity specifically validated the argument that their culture, shaped by Portuguese legacy, was central to Goan identity. For some Hindus who resented Christian privilege under the Portuguese, the language of 'unique identity' polarized society. In addition, in Goa, as we have seen in other regions, there was a class and caste dimension to political alliances. Labourers, agricultural workers and lower caste Hindus, many of whom had joined in pro-India politics before liberation, had high expectations for a post-Portuguese society. Counted by regional politicians in neighbouring states, they equated liberation both with economic and social advancement, on the one hand, and with integration into one of those states, on the other.

Arun Sinha argues that Nehru erred strategically in Goa's case. First of all he instituted too many changes too quickly. Especially frustrating was the dramatic increase in the use of the English language, both in schools and government. Second, he missed opportunities to celebrate and promote Goa's older history before the Portuguese. Relying on a colonial definition for Goa's 'unique identity' that was imbued with Portuguese cultural references, just as India was disposing of many British colonial trappings, proved counterproductive (Sinha, 2002). In addition, Nehru's emphasis on industrial development and infrastructure – building roads and bridges – while benefiting Goa's economy, did not bring agricultural changes as quickly as many peasant cultivators, who had supported Indian integration, expected.

The Central Government postponed a decision on the most contentious issue – that of Goa's merger with one of the neighbouring states – by initiating development programmes financed by the Centre and setting a date for Assembly elections. In other words, the conditions were put in place for establishing a separate state government. The exercise of forming a democratically elected government in Goa demonstrates a successful Indian strategy that assumed democratic participation and instilled nationalism and political integration. Indeed when the first Assembly elections took place on 20 December 1963 more than 65 per cent of voters (240,000) turned out.

Three parties contested for seats. The Maharashtra{}d\-Gomantak Party (MGP) supported the view that Goa belonged to the state of Maharashtra based on the regional culture and traditions of Hindus in both the states as well as their claim that Marathi, the language of Maharashtra, was the original mother tongue of all the Goans. Of course this defied contemporary practice; all Goans did not speak Marathi. The other key party, the United Goans Party (UGP), emphasized such contemporary realities. The UGP leaders comprised Christians as well as upper caste Hindus; their platform defended Goa's separate existence. Finally, there was a presence of the Congress Party in Goa. However, it waffled on the issue of merger with neighbouring states, focusing instead on a plank that called for development first and decisions about merger later.

Congress badly miscalculated and lost miserably, not winning a single seat in the 30-member Assembly. Rather, the MGP won 14 seats and the UGP 12. With three independents supporting the MGP, it gained a majority. A critical preoccupation of the first Assembly, which met from 1963 to 1966, was the question of language. The first Chief Minister known as Bhausaheb – Dayaram Bandodkar – envisioned Goa as part of Maharashtra and advocated Marathi language, much to the frustration of the opposition. UGP members by and large did not understand Marathi, but rather spoke both Portuguese and Konkani. The Central Government position, laid out for all union territories, called for official transactions to take place in Hindi or English.

Bandodkar, who had run on a platform of merger with Maharashtra mellowed his position in the years after the election. Some argue he was persuaded by Nehru to maintain a separate Goa (Sinha, 2002: 58). Others suggested that once in power Bandodkar saw the potential for his own administration to continue – either in the interest of regional development or as an ambitious politician. Either way, in practice, Bandodkar postponed merger; the Assembly continued to meet and began to deliberate in Konkani and, most impressively, it set a date in 1967 for a plebiscite to finally decide the question of merger.

While plebiscites obviously had a mixed history in India, in Goa the plebiscite was successful in the sense that 80 per cent of eligible voters participated. The results were somewhat surprising to the ruling MGP. While
the MGP had won the election on the merger plank, the vote for merger failed with only 43 per cent of Goans supporting it.

Therefore, Goa maintained its separate Legislative Assembly and state government. In the long run its integration into India was less a matter of imposed laws or language, but rather the economic boom of the growing tourist industry, brought to Goa by the lure of its beaches. The historic process that made Goa an Indian state, therefore followed a number of narrative trajectories, not just the Portuguese versus the Indian competition for control, but also the overlapping interpretations of events by Goan Christians, rural Goans, advocates of merger with Maharashtra, and Portuguese-speaking elites.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN KERALA AND REGIONAL ASSERTION

The act of consolidating contiguous principalities into the Indian state—such as Goa or Hyderabad—also served as a proxy for another one of India’s main concerns: preventing secessionist movements in regions of the already existing nation. Separatist movements formed, for example, early on in Tamil-speaking areas, now the state of Tamil Nadu, and in the late 1950s (after severe food shortages) in the northeast state of Mizoram. Such movements were suppressed militarily, accommodated politically, and dissipated through economic development. Tamil Nadu became a distinct Tamil-speaking state when Madras was divided and the Moslem movement resulted in the Mizo Accord in 1985, which brought increased stability to that state. But the issue of separatism remained a concern of the Indian Government over the decades.

Linked to this concern was also regional autonomy, which manifested in part in the political assertion of regional parties. Political scientists, in fact, have debated whether opposition-party governments in various states represented a challenge to the Centre or a useful safety valve (Bhalla, 1974; Hardgrave, 1993) and, of course, the answer can be both depending on the context. A number of parties developed which advocated specific regional concerns—the Akali Dal in Punjab or later the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh. But perhaps the most interesting case is the history of the Communist Party which, although a national party, developed strongholds in two states—an opposite side of the country—Kerala in the southwest and Bengal in the east.

From independence to the end of the twentieth century, the Communist Party formed the government in Kerala, winning majority in the Legislative Assembly nine times, alternating victories with other parties—primarily the Indian National Congress. In West Bengal it served as a coalition partner or sole government for seven terms (twice in the 1960s and then beginning in 1977, winning continually). Nevertheless the history of the Communist Party in post-independence India demonstrated the importance of the Left in both regional and national politics, shaping political discourse to address a peasant and worker constituency.

In addition, its success showed that a communist party could function within a democratic state. The implications of that participation ultimately fuelled an internal conflict within the Party about the relative importance of mass mobilisation versus electoral integration. As a result the Party split in 1964, giving birth to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – CPM, which went on to achieve great electoral success.

Perhaps precipitating this conflict was the victory of the as yet undivided Communist Party of India in Kerala in the first Legislative Assembly elections there in 1957, under the leadership of E. M. S. Namboodiripad, a celebrated freedom fighter. The anomaly that Indian communists succeeded in a multi-party electoral system and remained strong in regional pockets inspired not only the attention of historians and political scientists but also the literary imagination of Arundhati Roy. Her Booker Prize winning novel, _The God of Small Things_, which is set in Kerala, describes the attraction communism held for a character of that 1950s generation, Chacko Kochamma, whose political sympathies antagonized his landowning father but gained him communist sympathies in college. The narrator calls this the euphoria of 1957, when the communists won the State Assembly elections and Nehru invited them to form a government. Chacko’s hero, Conrado E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the flamingo Branimi high priest of Marxism in Kerala, became Chief Minister in the first ever democratically elected communist government in the world. Suddenly the communists found themselves in the extraordinary—critics said absurd—position of having to govern a people and foment revolution simultaneously (Roy, 1997: 67). Put in historical terms, Namboodiripad dealt with the political contradictions by developing a theoretical model for what he called in a published pamphlet of the same name, the Peaceful Transition to Communism. But it was precisely this sense of accommodation to the state that sparked dissonance in the national party.

The novel itself focuses on the intimacies and antagonisms fostered by the close contact between classes and castes thrown together by the necessities and traditions of small-town life. It turns on the tragic consequences to one particular Christian family, which comes from the landed classes, when one of its members crosses caste and class lines. In this context an ironic narrator muses about the reasons the Communists Party was so successful in Kerala.

There were several competing theories. One was that it had to do with the large population of Christians in the state…Structurally—a somewhat rudimentary theory went—Marxism was a simple substitute for Christianity. Replace God with Marx, Satan with the bourgeoisie, Heaven...
with a classless society, the Church with the Party, and the form and purpose of the journey remained similar. . . . The trouble with this theory was that in Kerala the Syrian Christians were, by and large, the wealthy estate-owning (pickle factory-running) feudal lords, for whom communism represented a fate worse than death. A second theory claimed that it had to do with the comparatively high level of literacy in the state. Perhaps. Except that the high literacy level was largely because of the communist movement. The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. . . . The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appealing to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy.

(Roy, 1997: 66)

This critique indeed coincided with the challenges from the Left wing within the Communist Party of India before the 1964 split.

The split in the party is often described as Right v. Left and as historian, Ross Mallick suggests, the Left attracted more pro-Chinese members and advocated more immediate mass revolution, while the Right was characterized by intellectuals, many of whom were trained in Europe and leaned toward the Soviets (Mallick, 1994: 30–45). Therefore, when the China War broke out, many on the Left argued that a fellow communist state could not possibly be an aggressor. In this configuration Nambudiripad was a Centrist, like his colleague in West Bengal, Jyoti Basu; both saw the need for a popular base, not only to build a revolution, but also to win elections. As Nambudiripad articulated it, mass revolution and the mobilization of the proletariat was still the ultimate goal of the Party, but in the mean time, there were immediate needs to be met. The 1957 government did not adequately meet those needs and ultimately fell.

The Central Government of India perhaps helped shape the contours of the party splits, when it arrested some 60 leaders of the Communist Party of India in West Bengal following the China War on the grounds that they harboured Chinese sympathies (Mallick, 1994: 38). Falsely, the government arrested the Centrists along with the Left-wing camp. This set the stage for common ground between the two and leaders like E. M. S. Nambudiripad and Jyoti Basu, after much negotiation, joined the new Communist Party of India Marxist, known as the CPI (M) or CPM. Indeed the CPM under Nambudiripad’s leadership in Kerala returned to power in 1969.

In both Kerala and West Bengal the Communist Party showed its ongoing participation in Constitutionalism and multi-party democracy. The integration of communists into the structure of government showed another kind of consolidation of the Indian nation as in Hyderabad, Goa, and Kashmir.

But also as the history of Kashmir showed – national integration once achieved is not necessarily ongoing. The next decades showed continued conflict over Kashmir and new secessionist movements, such as the one in Punjab. The CPM, in fact, played key roles in influencing parliamentary politics. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Right-wing parties, most of which evolved from Pro-Hindu politics, as well as secular communists, challenged the Congress Party, which continued to win a majority of elections at the Centre. This story re-emerges in Chapter 4.

CONCLUSION

For Nehru’s visions of India as a player in world politics, the success of integrating princely states and Portuguese Goa was as important as defining foreign policy. Furthermore, the consolidation of contiguous states served as a bulwark against regional tensions within India’s established borders. The ability to integrate Hyderabad and Goa set useful examples for Tamil Nadu and Kerala – and perhaps vice versa.

While Kashmir remained the most contentious issue in both India’s domestic and foreign policy, the ultimate integration of Hyderabad, Goa, Junagadh, and the support of the princes in what became the Indian state of Rajasthan, symbolized India’s commitment to cultural diversity. Nevertheless, Nehru clearly did not have a template to apply to each set of negotiations, plebiscites, military intervention, economic coercion, encouragement of popular mobilization, and diplomacy all played a role.

A critical feature that united these cases was the involvement of the fledgling United Nations. Hyderabad sought redress in the UN, as did Portugal. This underscored the blurred line between domestic crises and international ones. Nowhere was that debate more potent than over the border conflict with China. What became crystallized in the China War and in China’s surprising unilateral withdrawal was also a domestic debate about how India stood in Asia, what was its relationship with China, and how did it define its international borders.

Just as India was engaged in these political and geopolitical debates about its national identity, it was also defining itself in terms of art and culture. In fact, with the serious blow of defeat against China, the task of building up cultural institutions took on even greater importance. The next chapter examines some of the cultural institutions and expressions in the 1950s and 1960s.
Green and other revolutions

When Indira Gandhi became prime minister on 24 January 1966, no one imagined how India would be transformed under her stewardship. In twelve years, India moved from being dependent on the international community for food to becoming a food exporter. In addition, in contrast to the non-definitive military conflicts of the 1960s, it soundly defeated Pakistan in a war that created the new nation of Bangladesh. Meanwhile, India experienced widespread political mobilization by peasants and other disadvantaged groups — both non-violent and violent — over unfulfilled promises of development and the need for social and political change. Following this and in a shocking departure from democracy, Indira Gandhi imposed an ‘Emergency’ in 1975, suspending civil liberties, arresting opponents, and postponing elections. In doing so, Indira Gandhi was exercising a provision in the Constitution that provided ‘Emergency powers’ under the extraordinary circumstances of a threat to the nation. This chapter is not about the Emergency — that comes in Chapter 5 — however, the political movements and monumental events described in this chapter are linked historically to the Emergency and so it appears, tangentially, in these pages as well.

Specifically this chapter traces the rapid economic and political change from 1965 to 1973, in terms of the fixtures and frustrations it exposed in Indian society. It is not surprising that such names as the Green Revolution, the Total Revolution, and the Nasrullah Rebellion attached to this time. Nor is it surprising, that political opponents call this period, ‘Indira Raj’, underscoring the prime minister’s increasingly autocratic power as ultimately demonstrated in the Emergency.

Therefore, this chapter is about sweeping political and economic changes and some of their unintended consequences. But there is a lesson about history here too. This period — and this chapter — illustrates three important characteristics of post-independent Indian history. First of all, national politics as practiced by leaders and elites is always in dialogue (if not literally, then figuratively) with Indian citizens. Perhaps it is a legacy of the Freedom Movement that movement politics, grassroots organizing, and public protest are never far from the surface. Indian people articulate their political aspirations in all sorts of ways to get the attention of those in power. The dialogue is not always successful and the consequences are not always intended, but one can hear the voices of politics in every arena. Second, young and old intellectuals in India engage in politics at all levels — as activists, as student protestors, as members of government, as those lobbying government, and as those explaining the issues of the day. Therefore, the sources of history — newspapers, manifestoes, posters and wall paintings — are often the products of history-makers themselves.

However, there are two caveats to the shape of the discussion set out in this chapter. First, it is important to recognize that even in these dramatic times, everyday life continued. Women and men in villages woke up to go to the fields and plant paddy. Little girls in crisp white skirts gathered their books tied with a strap and went to school. The annual Madras music season featured thousands of performances with increased demand in the early 1970s, and theatres filled with spectators watched Amitabh Bachchan, the great cinematic hero, in films such as ‘Devar’ in 1975.

Second, despite Indira Gandhi’s overwhelming power, the prime minister is not the dominant character in this chapter. A series of other, particularly economic and social forces, shaped events in this period as well. For example, the so-called Green Revolution in high-yielding grains that transformed Indian agriculture began in the term of Indira Gandhi’s predecessor, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. The peasant rebellion in the Naxalbari district of Bengal, which has come to symbolize armed agrarian resistance in general, originated as a regional phenomenon, not directly related to Mrs. Ghandi administration. But the collective consequences of all these events ultimately did connect to the Indian Government as a whole.

This chapter, therefore, which begins with the Green Revolution, traces other dramatic — similarly revolutionary — transformations, such as the Naxalite Rebellion, the Bangladesh War, the Anti-Price Rise Movement, Jaya Prakash Narayan’s Total Revolution, and the call by the Committee on the Status of Women for radical measures to assure women’s equality. As Vandita Gandhi said in relation to the Anti-Price Rise Movement, ‘there is a “culture” of politics that has evolved, and been developed by women and men in different ways as a result of their historical experiences, and their expectations of the political system’ (N. Gandhi, 1996: 14). This chapter provides much evidence for the diversity of that political culture as it was projected in the 1960s and 1970s.
THE GREEN REVOLUTION

The Green Revolution was in many ways neither 'green', at least in the current use of that term, nor was it a 'revolution' in the political sense and it was not a solely Indian phenomenon. Rather it was a globally supported movement to increase crop yields through chemically and technologically enhanced agriculture. In the 1960s Indian economic development, as elaborated in the First and Second Five year plans initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru, emphasized centralized planning, industrial growth and improvement of infrastructure. Through models developed by P. C. Mahalanobis (who was by training a statistician) the Indian economy pursued a policy of import substitution that concentrated government resources on the heavy industries. By the mid-1960s, it became apparent that these development models increased, rather than alleviated, social and economic inequality; bureaucratic, entrepreneurial, and professional classes fared far better than urban workers or anyone in the countryside.

Two immediate effects were significant. First of all, while legislation for zamindari abolition (i.e., reform of the land system) had been introduced, the actual reallocation of land was slow to take place, where it happened at all. Landlords used loopholes to retain property or gave it to loyal tenant cultivators and relatives. In addition, peasant cultivators who gained land often found access to seeds, water, and markets still out of their control. As a result, opposition political parties began calling for more intervention by the government [Doc. 25, p. 154].

Second, and perhaps related to the first, India continued to have food shortfalls, due to inefficient production as well as droughts and floods. India, therefore, imported grain in large quantities. An innovative example of a trade deal from this period arose between India and the United States, under the PL-480 programme, a law that permitted developing countries to purchase grain with their own currency. One consequence of PL-480 trade with India was the development and advancement of the field of South Asian studies in the United States. The U. S. Government made the rupees available to major research centres to build their library collections and support research abroad in India.

From India's point of view, however, relying on food aid created a complicated relationship with America and undermined its well-cultivated policy of non-alignment. Domestically, it also revealed a blatant contradiction between aggressive industrial growth on the one hand, and gradual agrarian reform on the other, increasing the economic distinctions between wealthy urban and poor rural communities. In the words of the journalist Gurcharan Das, this policy produced 'capitalism for the rich and socialism for the poor'. But, he claimed, neither was working (Das, 2002: 130).

In 1965, after Nehru's death, he was succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri, and a number of pressing domestic and international issues faced the new prime minister. Shastri turned his immediate attention to the confrontation with Pakistan over the Rann of Kutch invasion (on India's west coast) and was forced to resign. The World Bank pressed him to implement agricultural reforms in order to boost food production. Therefore, he delegated agricultural decisions to C. Subramaniam, the Minister of Food and Agriculture, who began to implement dramatic changes in agricultural policy.

Subramaniam shared the view advanced by experts from America and the World Bank that massive investment in modern technology provided the key to increased agricultural output. Therefore, he proposed a restructuring of agricultural policy. He abandoned farm cooperatives, a policy inspired by Gandhian philosophy that under the purview of the Community Development Minister had met with striking failure. Gandhi had believed India's future lay in the establishment of self-sufficient village communities; he had created several of these in his lifetime. Inspired by these, the Community Development Ministry established cooperative societies, largely for the purpose of providing rural credit. While the government targeted 64% per cent participation in cooperative schemes by 1967, in fact participation rates proved as low as 36% per cent and did not improve over time (Bansil, 1975: 261). However, there were some successes in the cooperative movement, particularly in the sugar industry. In addition, several states including Punjab, Tamil Nadul, and Andhra Pradesh saw dynamic increases in agricultural loans; however, the number of defaults on loans was staggering.

Instead of increasing support to the cooperative movement, Subramaniam implemented a three-pronged plan that included:

1. new policies, which stressed scientific techniques and privileged regions with assured rainfall or existing irrigation systems;
2. incentives to farmers including fixed prices for agricultural products, and
3. adoption of new high-yield seed varieties, fertilisers, and pesticides.

Eagerly, the United States and the World Bank financed these radical changes in hopes of showing India as a model of agricultural development and food independence in the Third World.

To combat political resistance in Parliament, Subramaniam sought rapid and dramatic results. He embraced the most aggressive policies of agricultural engineering. He reportedly chartered several Boeing 707s and imported 16,000 metric tons of seed of a remarkable dwarf wheat plant created by an American scientist in Mexico. The variety, called 'Lerma Rojo', took off in Punjab, and the production of wheat there tripled from 1951 to 1966 and even more
dramatically nearly doubled again between 1966 and 1968, from 2,494,000 to 4,320,000 tons (Doc 26, p. 154). However, before these benefits could be fully realized, there was another crisis.

Even as India embarked on what came to be known as the Green Revolution, the monsoon failed in 1965 and its new prime minister, Indira Gandhi, was compelled to seek additional food aid from the United States. Indira Gandhi became prime minister when Lal Bahadur Shastri died in office. She had served as Minister of Broadcasting and as President of the Congress Party previously, but she had little experience in public office. Rather as the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru who had apprenticed with a great politician.

In the event of the food crisis, her negotiations with Lyndon Johnson in Washington in March 1966 led to a massive injection of assistance in the form of grain and loans. In exchange, Johnson expected further measures in India to reform the economy and increase food production and Mrs. Gandhi did, in fact, devolve the budget. However, the discomfort of the encounter furthered her commitment to show India's independence and non-alignment.

Therefore, she chose to follow her state visit to Washington with a state visit to the Soviet Union — and this at the peak of the Cold War. She also issued sharp attacks on United States intervention in Vietnam.

As American dissatisfaction registered Johnson not only protested, but restricted and trickled out the promised aid. Mrs. Gandhi plunged further into high-yield agricultural policies. C. Subramaniam, who continued to serve as Agriculture Minister, increased support to agricultural institutes and grain research. Particularly, he challenged and supported M. S. Swaminathan at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in New Delhi to carry out cutting-edge research on wheat and rice varieties. India also invested in rice varieties created in the Philippines and Taiwan. For example, the Taiwanese rice, introduced in Tamil Nadu, was also highly responsive to fertilizer and gave extraordinary yields of 3000 to 6000 pounds per acre — three times that of local varieties.

Overall, the Green Revolution remarkably increased total grain production in India by a factor of 25 per cent by 1971 and by 1975 India reached its goal of food self-sufficiency. Of course, that language of self-sufficiency, so important politically and materially in the 1970s, seems outraged in today's global economy. In fact in 1979 and 1987 India did incur grain in order to deal with droughts. However, the achievement of the Green Revolution was the terms on which agricultural trade now took place and that by the mid-1980s, during the height of the famine in Ethiopia, India provided food aid, as it has in many other crises since then.

Environmental consequences of the Green Revolution took decades to emerge; for example, the depletion of soil, lowering of the water table, and health damage to farmers from heavy chemical fertilizers and pesticides gradually revealed themselves. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Punjab, once a key beneficiary of Subramaniam’s policies because it already had irrigation systems and received good rainfall, suffered from water shortages because too much water was being pumped out of the ground, and, in addition, dependence on pesticides and mono-cropping made fields vulnerable to new blights. Each new disease or resistant insect required another pesticide and more chemical intervention.

Other consequences of the Green Revolution appeared right away. Agriculture so dependent on special seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides required access to capital. As a result even the benefits of the Green Revolution replicated, and in some cases exacerbated, social and economic inequalities. Peasants in regions not favoured by Green Revolution policy organized resistance. A major peasant rebellion in 1967 in the Naxalbari district of Bengal called attention to a simmering crisis in the countryside, prompted by inadequate land distribution.

THE NAXALBARI REBELLION

Lal inqalab se The red revolution
Ho gaya, jahan ilaka has arrived in this whole region
Upar neechhe la Above and below is red.
Dilh la aafab See the red sunrise
Utho gareeb inqalab Awaken O poor to revolution.

These words from a revolutionary peasant song expressed the ideological spirit of peasant agitation that had occurred periodically in various parts of India since the 1930s. In most of those examples, the idea of revolution was symbolic and its impact was largely non-violent. However, the Sangharm in the Telangana movement in the state of Hyderabad in the 1950s, another armed struggle emerged in the Naxalbari region of West Bengal in 1967.

The Naxalbari rebellion, named after the district where it took place, reached its peak between March and August of 1967. Initially peasants, many of whom came from the tribal communities of West Bengal, formed village committees to take back land they believed was theirs. They occupied fields, burnt land records and began to arm themselves. According to Pradeep Singh, a police officer turned writer, the following event characterizes the early movement:

March 3, 1967: Three sharecroppers, Lapa Kishan, Sangu Kishan and Ratia Kishan, supported by CPI (M) Communist Party of India-Marxist) [party workers], armed with lathis (wooden staffs) bows and arrows and carrying party flags, lifted the entire stock of paddy (rice) from the landlord’s storehouse.

(Singh, 1995: 3)
The CPI (M) referred to in Singh’s note is a political party that in the 1967 election emerged as a major political force in the government of West Bengal. The kind of clash he described continued to take place with increasing violence through to the end of May. Then using massive force and wide-scale arrests, the government suppressed the rebellion by the end of July. Most significant about the Naxalbari rebellion was the high degree of organization. Since the 1950s, peasants of Naxalbari had been locally organized; however, their agitation had become absorbed into the communist movement, so that by 1967, the local CPI (M) cadres (i.e., party workers), of neighboring towns, Siliguri and Darjeeling, formed a critical part of the resistance.

The causes of unrest were longstanding, having to do with the excesses of power exerted by rural intermediaries, who behaved as landlords, collecting rent and controlling production. They represented the oppressive agrarian system that encouraged peasant indebtedness and landlessness. However, several circumstances in 1967 provided the immediate catalyst for rebellion. Ironically, one of them was the election of a left-wing government in West Bengal, which was obviously caught in the middle by the agitation.

The victory of the United Front in state elections in West Bengal raised hopes for implementation of long-awaited land reform because a key participant in the governing coalition was the CPI (M). The CPI (M) as a political party, resulted from a split of the Communist Party of India in 1964 based on divisions over tactics, strategies and emphases. Those who remained loyal to Soviet-style communism and received support from the USSR kept the name CPI and those who advocated peasant mobilization and perhaps greater sympathy toward Mao became the CPI (M). In fact, in the West Bengal United Front government of 1967, the Minister for Land and Land Revenue, Harikrishna Konar, was a veteran CPI (M) peasant leader. His first stated goal was to enforce existing land ceilings and redistribute land to poor peasants and landless laborers.

However, two factors encouraged rebellion. First of all, Naxalbari, which lies in the far northern part of West Bengal contained a large population of Scheduled Tribe communities — Santals, Oraons, and Rajbanshis (often called tribals) — who practice different religious and cultural traditions from the largely Hindu and Muslim Bengalis. Tribals felt doubly disenfranchised because their land had increasingly been controlled by non-tribals, such as Hindu Bengalis and other north Indian tea planters. Many of the leaders of the rebellion emerged from these local tribal communities.

Second, the United Front government exacerbated local tensions in part by raising expectations. Even Konar found implementing land reform through legal means frustrating. In the years since land ceilings had been imposed, landlords had found creative means to circumvent them, for example establishing homoni tenures, i.e., giving away land to loyal peasants and relatives. Also, as soon as Konar announced plans to enforce the law, landlords began evicting peasants to undermine the on-the-ground reality of their claims to the land. So local CPI (M) cadres, who in the past were supporters of rebels, were now tainted by their party's participation in the United Front government. Therefore, to people in Naxalbari, the failures of the United Front revealed the limitations of even an expectedly sympathetic government.

However, the United Front was not perceived as wholly sympathetic. One of the CPI (M)'s first acts upon taking leadership was to distance itself—or at least its legislators in the Assembly—from the peasant movement in Naxalbari. Two prominent leaders, Charu Mazumdar, whose theoretical positions formed a critical basis for the movement, and Kanu Sanyal expressed deep frustration with this rejection by the party. Both had been loyal members of the CPI (M) until this time, and Jangal Santhal, a tribal peasant leader, had actually stood for election to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on a CPI (M) ticket. However, Santhal and Sanyal were both arrested before the election under the Preventive Detention Act, and Santhal stood for election and was defeated from jail (S. Banerjee, 1985: 94).

Therefore it was in the context of this frustration—not certain where most CPI (M) loyalties lay—that one of the first violent clashes took place on 23 May. Armed tribes killed a policeman named Sranam Wangu, who had come to arrest some peasant leaders. The police, with state sanction from the Chief Minister, Ajay Mukherjee, responded without restraint. According to academic reports, more than 1500 police were dispatched to the region (Fondo, 1971). In one police firing nine people were killed. Students, along with some CPI (M) leaders, protested the government action in Calcutta (now Kolkata) demonstrating that divisions were developing within the party.

It was symbolically significant that wall paintings—a popular form of political expression in West Bengal—which some months before promoted CPI (M) candidates, now protested against the same government that the CPI (M) had joined. Between June and August 1967 the peasant committees waged open war, seizing guns and using homemade weapons in violent clashes to take over land and force out landlords. Accounts differ on how the rebellion ended; however, most sources estimate that 1300 people were arrested, including Jangal Santhal, and most of the leadership. The Central Government in Delhi, represented by Home Minister, Y. B. Chavan, provided support and resources to West Bengal to quell the rebellion. It appears that by August the movement had lost its force.

The most lasting consequence of the Naxalbari rebellion was the organized armed insurrection. It is spawned in a number of rural areas in Andhra Pradesh and later in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Bihar, and Kerala, under the name ‘Naxalities’. While most of the original Naxalbari leaders were arrested in 1967 or in
Kanu Sanyal’s case, 1969. Charu Mazumdar remained underground until 1972, and their inheritance continued among diverse and often rival organizations. In fact, the divisions among Naxalite groups manifested in the various names of their organizations – the People’s War Group (PWG), Maoist Coordination Committee (MCC), as well as the CPI (M-L), meaning Maoist-Leninists. This splintering of the movement has led to largely local activism among Naxalites and perhaps has diffused the possibility for a unified assault on Indian Government institutions.

However, significant rebellions continued. For example, in the districts of Bihar in the 1980s there were well-organized attacks against landlords in response to highly publicized landlord atrocities and, in Andhra Pradesh from 1980 onwards, the PWG assassinated a member of Parliament and three state-level officials and in 2003 made an attempt to assassinate the chief minister. In some pockets, Naxalite groups maintained semi-autonomous control over villages or even districts in defiance of usual government structures; by contrast in other areas CPI (M-L) candidates ran for public office as part of the electoral system.

The next challenge to face West Bengal, however, was of international implications: in 1971 West Bengal began to absorb a dramatic influx of refugees from East Pakistan, who were fleeing the Pakistani civil war. This crisis triggered India’s direct intervention in the creation of the nation of Bangladesh.

INDIA AND THE REVOLT IN EAST PAKISTAN

The Pakistani civil war most immediately presented India with a refugee crisis, but also represented instability on two divergent and strategically important borders. Watching the visible disintegration of India’s neighbor and rival, Indira Gandhi entered the war indirectly, then directly, and achieved India’s first decisive military victory. The Bangladesh war in 1971 transformed Indira Gandhi’s leadership by consolidating her recent electoral victory and the split she had forced in the Congress Party. Second, it left India undisputedly the most powerful nation in South Asia. To understand this, it is important to examine some of the details of both the war and Indian politics preceding it, because several historical currents came together at this moment in 1971.

Indira Gandhi became prime minister in 1966 at the sufferance of a powerful group of Congress Party leaders called the ‘Syndicate’. Faced with the sudden death of Lal Bahadur Shastri and possible instability, the Syndicate chose Indira Gandhi for the post, hoping that they might govern from behind the scenes. However, once in power Mrs. Gandhi immediately tackled a number of pressing domestic problems, as her agricultural policy, cited above, demonstrates. In the 1967 elections, the Congress performed poorly, not only in parliamentary elections but in the state elections as well. The victory of the United Front in West Bengal represented one of six states to form non-Congress governments. Mrs. Gandhi blamed the situation on infighting within the party and saw Congress leaders undermining her control.

She pressed on with a number of controversial policies that appealed to the Left (and particularly the left-wing of the Party), including land reform, increased taxes on wealth, and nationalization of major banks. In addition, she made several personnel decisions that thwarted the Syndicate – relieving Morarji Desai, one of its members, of the finance portfolio and supporting V. V. Giri in the election for President of India over the official Congress nominee. The Congress leadership, which was dominated by the party’s conservative wing (and also by the Syndicate to which she was showing her independence), expelled her for ‘indiscipline’ on 12 November 1969.

However, secure that she had sufficient numbers of loyal followers, Indira Gandhi responded by splitting the party and calling for a confidence vote in Parliament. Although a majority of Congress MPs stayed with her, it was not enough to form a government of its own. She turned, therefore, to the Communist Party and regional parties to build a majority and as a result she remained prime minister. She continued to consolidate her support both in Parliament and among the people. Under the slogan ‘garibi hatao’ (eliminate poverty), she campaigned throughout the country and emphasized the ideological basis of the party split. This also showed her appreciation for the support of the Communists. Then she called early elections for 1–13 March 1971. The elections confirmed her control over the party: her faction won a larger majority in Parliament in 1971 than the undivided Congress had achieved in 1967.

It was following this decisive victory that Indira Gandhi tackled the political situation rendered by internal conflict in Pakistan. For three months the situation in East Pakistan had been deteriorating, as a Constitutional crisis became a military and humanitarian one. Indira Gandhi used careful diplomacy and strategic military force to advance the interests of both India and the Bangaldeshis. This may have been the height of her political prowess.

PAKISTAN’S INTERNAL CONFLICT

Pakistan – East and West – held elections in December 1970, during which cleavages between the eastern and western wings of the nation manifested themselves so severely, they precipitated the secession of East Pakistan. Since
Pakistan's creation in 1947, there remained a number of political imbalances between the East and the West. The military personnel largely came from West Pakistan and its government, which twice had ended in martial law, had always had a West Pakistani leader. Linguistically and culturally, East Pakistan saw itself as distinct, for example, celebrating its Bengali identity through language, rather than adopting the Urdu spoken in West Pakistan. In the 1950s language riots in Dacca (in the East) forced the Pakistan Government to recognize Bengali along with Urdu as co-equal national languages. The Awami League (originally the Awami Muslim League, founded in 1949) advanced the interests of ethnic Bengalis within the Pakistani state.

In 1966, the Awami League leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, announced a Six Point Plan for greater autonomy in East Pakistan. It argued for a more equal distribution of resources for healthcare, schools, and other government services. From the point of view of the national government in the capital of Islamabad—which also was located in the West—Bengali autonomy threatened the integrity of the nation. East Pakistan was larger than any single province in the West and the government was concerned that linguistic autonomy for East Bengal might encourage some of the western linguistic minorities in Baluchistan or Sind to make similar demands.

Meanwhile, Pakistan prepared for its first direct election to a National Assembly in December 1970. General Yahya Khan, Martial Law Administrator and President of Pakistan, endorsed a Constitution that granted East Pakistan 162 out of 300 seats in the Assembly. This reflected the distribution of population across East and West and served as a gesture toward some of East Pakistan's demands.

The election, however, proved more politically conclusive than expected. Running on the separatis Six Point Plan that outlined Bengali autonomy, the Awami League won 150 of 162 seats in East Pakistan. This gave it an absolute majority, not only in the East, but also in the National legislature. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party, the main contender in the West, did not fare as well; it won only 81 seats, the rest going to small minority parties. Therefore, technically, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (popularly called Sheikh Mujib) would have become prime minister of the entire nation. However, neither Bhutto nor Yahya Khan found this acceptable and Yahya Khan postponed the inauguration of the National Assembly.

From January to March 1971, negotiations continued in order to resolve what had now become a Constitutional crisis. The Awami League called for non-cooperation in East Pakistan, holding out for the Six Point Plan and regional autonomy. The convulsive response in East Pakistan to non-cooperation reflected longstanding frustrations and there were clashes in the streets. It was the excuse of quelling this violence that Yahya Khan sent in the army to East Pakistan. But the army too exerted undue force. Students at Dacca University, intellectuals, and prominent Awami League leaders were rounded up, jailed, or killed, and on 25 March Sheikh Mujib was arrested, though not before he declared Bangladesh an independent nation.

The West Pakistani army then attacked East Pakistan with full force, compelling hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee to India. Especially destructive was a systematic process in the army that intentionally targeted teachers, lawyers, and, in general, the intelligentsia of Bangladesh. Refugee camps too became targets of the Pakistani military. Meanwhile, India began arming Bangladeshi militants called the Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters) and became further drawn into the conflict.

The situation in Bangladesh became a test of Indira Gandhi's will. Having just secured her own electoral victory, Mrs. Gandhi became a public and international advocate of the Bangladeshi people. At great cost—from $3 to $4 million a day, the Indian Government fed and housed the continuing flow of refugees. By the end of the summer an estimated 6 million Bangladeshis had fled into India. Rather than immediately military intervention, Mrs. Gandhi began an international tour, presenting the crisis to the world community and pleading for funds for the refugees now living in India. She also called for diplomatic intervention.

Not quite diplomacy, but in August of 1971 a group of rock musicians in conjunction with the famous Indian (and Bengali) star, Ravi Shankar, brought international attention to Bangladesh. Coordinated by Ravi Shankar and George Harrison—a former member of the Beatles, who had begun to practice Hindustan and had significant interest in South Asia—the Concert for Bangladesh proposed to raise funds for Bangladeshi refugees. The concert blunted the various causes of disaster—the 1970 Bhola cyclone and the 1971 civil war—but the event raised a quarter of a million dollars and did more in terms of publicity. On the one hand it perpetuated an image that equated Bangladesh with starvation; on the other it set a precedent for fundraising concerts, which have continued to raise money for international causes since then. Long after the concert, sales from the Concert for Bangladesh album raised fifteen million dollars for UNICEF—the United Nations Children's Fund.

Indira Gandhi's international efforts included a 20-day trip in October to Western Europe, the Soviet Union, and the United States. In Britain, on 31 October, she gave public addresses and also had a private meeting with Prime Minister Edward Heath. Her message was that India was struggling to provide resources for refugees and although she did not wish to entangle Britain in the affairs of South Asia, she hoped they would support the cause of the Bangladesh state.

Meanwhile also in October, she began to prepare for war; Sam Manekshaw, the head of the Indian Army, recalled later that Indira Gandhi presented him with the problem of the Bangladesh crisis and asked him,
Along with left-wing political parties, students were protesting corruption in the educational system and in the Bihar Government. On 18 March 1974, they marched on the Legislative Assembly in Bihar’s capital Patna and were met by police who forcefully pushed them back. In the clash that followed, a government warehouse and a couple of other buildings were burned and several students were killed and injured. Shocked by the police tactics, JP wrote an article against the repressive use of force against protesters, which the students understood to be a sign of solidarity. As a result, they approached him to take up a role of leadership in the movement. JP too was looking for signs that there were patriotic elements organizing for social change. As recorded by his colleague and biographer, Madhu Dandavate, JP described his enthusiasm for the student movement as a continuation of his own quest: ‘I was groping in the darkness; but I saw a new rising force of Youth Power’ (Dandavate, 2002: 172).

Narayan formed an organization called Citizens for Democracy in order to push for an end to corruption in government and equal access to the resources of the state. The main planks of Citizens for Democracy included:

- strive for free and fair elections,
- create public opinion in favour of freedom and democracy on burning issues of the day,
- create an awareness of civil liberties and defend them through peaceful and legitimate means,
- strive for clean and healthy public life by launching anti-corruption movement, aimed at higher levels of administration and government,
- involve people intelligently in anti-price rise movement,
- to become aware of the faulty machinations of corrupt officials, dishonest businessmen and beguiling politicians and to create the necessary organizations to protect the interests of the consumers.

(Citizens for Democracy, www.healthlibrary.com)

Other protests followed around the state and the police responded severely. In one police firing in Gaya, eight people were killed and others wounded. In response, JP led a silent protest in Patna, calling for restraint. He demanded that the movement remain non-violent and set up a committee to propose electoral reforms and challenge corruption in government.

On 5 June in a rally in Patna, he proclaimed the need for ‘Total Revolution’, the name that became associated with the movement. Its aim was redemption of the pledge of 1947, when Nehru called for a just and equitable society [Doc. 1, pp. 134–5]. JP argued that persisting poverty, landlessness, and soaring prices demonstrated that government had failed in its responsibility to its people [Doc. 28, pp. 155–8]. Even more specifically he publicly criticized Mrs. Gandhi and pointed specifically to corrupt practices in Congress governments, not just in Bihar but elsewhere.
JP's threat to Indira Gandhi's government was in part due to his moral authority among her opposition and that his movement had momentum. It inspired a number of young would-be politicians to enter politics and in fact that was one of its legacies. The idea of Total Revolution resonated with other movements taking place around the country. For example, although JP opposed the violence of the Naxalite movement, he expressed sympathy for the tribals' claims to land. He also supported existing movements to fight inflation and the rapid rise in the price of foodstuffs. In this sense, he was appealing to concurrent struggles in other states such as the Anti-Price Rise Movement in Maharashtra.

ANTIPRICE RISE MOVEMENT

In 1972, protests against the high cost of food responded to a grain and financial crisis induced by the Bangladesh war. Although food production had increased more than 25 per cent by 1971 and the grain stores had been filled by the Green Revolution, the unexpected burden of feeding 8 million refugees had over-loaded the system. Furthermore, the war had depleted the country's financial reserves. Food prices increased and in various cities, people began mobilizing in protest.

Out of necessity and with great reluctance, Indira Gandhi approached the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). They immediately dispensed necessary funds, but demanded austerity measures in the form of retractions in social programmes and anti-inflation policies, such as freezing wages and increasing exports. The resulting pressure, especially on the urban middle and lower classes, aggregated national protests rather than alleviating them (Frankel, 1978: 515–16).

One story of women's protest against price rises, which took place in Maharashtra, illustrates the culture of mobilization that extended elsewhere. From August 1972 to June 1973 women in Maharashtra staged a series of organized protests against the government in response to prices or scarcity of specific commodities. In three years, there were protests against the level of the quota on grain purchases, the prices of milk and cooking oil, and scarcities of kerosene and other goods. Collectively, the protests came to be called the Anti-Price Rise Movement and it was especially remarkable for the diversity in tactics it comprised, from large rallies to meetings with government officials, and neighbourhood displays of solidarity.

While, even at the time, these collective protests were called a movement, they were in fact more loosely organized than the word 'movement' usually suggests and unlike most movements they were directed at a single issue: food prices. The most complete history of these protests appears in Nandita Gandhi's book, titled When the Rolling Pins Hit the Streets, taking its name from the 'lathi morchas' protest marches of women carrying rolling pins, which were their hallmark (N. Gandhi, 1996). The movement began with informal gatherings that brought together various women's groups to focus on the ongoing crisis caused by inflation. Agreeing that increasing food costs hit women especially hard, leaders of a number of women's organizations, associated mainly with left-wing political parties, formed a common group which they referred to as the Mahangai Pratikar Sanyukta Mahila Andolan (which means women's movement organized against price rises). Among them, for example, was Pramila Dandavate of the Socialist Party, who later became an MP and Minita Gore, who was a sitting Member of the Legislative Assembly in Maharashtra and also a future parliamentarian (Jain, 1993: 526).

The nature of the early actions of the Anti-Price Rise Movement (APRM) as it was known in English) shows some of the character of the movement. In a public meeting before the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, women threatened to gherao (lock in) ministers if they did not come up with a policy to address the high price of milk. However, they also presented those ministers with bangles (bracelets) as a sign of bravery to encourage them in their efforts.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the protests was their creative use of symbols. Minita Gore described the Samiti's complex tactics this way:

Women and children could not usually come to morchas so we thought of the ghanta raon or death knell. I announced it in a meeting and asked, 'Will you go to the street corner and beat your ghanta (metal plates) so loud that the city will resound with our noise?' For such a thing women would not have to travel but simply go up to their terraces or street corners. Middle class women preferred meetings to morchas (large rallies) so we would keep meetings at regular intervals. Gheraos had to be kept secret so we should only call those women who could be easily contacted.

(Gore in Gandhi, 1996: 33)

In this way, different women could participate in ways that were the most productive for them. These were not new tactics – in peasant movements in Bihar in the 1930s, for example, women had beaten pots while men seized crops. But the APRM movement used this combination of tactics and coordination of strategies to strong effect.

The influence of the movement came in its constant pressure on the government, not only in the state, but on Indira Gandhi herself. At a meeting in January 1974 in Maharashtra, Indira Gandhi's speech was disrupted when a large section of her audience hurled shoes and sandals at the dais, shouting 'Bhajan naa do, raasle do' (Don't give us a speech, give us food rations) (Masani, 1976: 309).
Seen in the context of other economic protests of the period, the Anti-Price Rise Movement contributed to the environment of protest against the government that had emerged nearly simultaneously from different sections of society and different regions. In the context of women’s politics, the APRM encouraged other forms of organizing among women and especially the coordination of disparate groups. This process became hijacked during the Emergency, but reappears later.

TOWARDS WOMEN’S EQUALITY

The publication in 1974 of Towards Equality, the Report of the National Committee on the Status of Women in India, set the stage for decades of discussion and political proposals to address women’s ability to gain access to rights ensured them in India’s Constitution. The Report demonstrated a serious gap between the promises of gender equality enshrined in the Constitution and the women’s access to all those promised benefits of citizenship. The Committee’s work, coinciding with the ongoing social and political movements discussed in this chapter, and taking place during the prime ministership of an internationally recognized, powerful woman, magnified the significance of its findings.

Perhaps ironically, Indira Gandhi came to symbolize to the world the advancement both of Indian women and women in general. Under her stewardship, India entered a small club of nations in which a woman stood as the head of state. From an Indian perspective, though, her high profile position was not unique; she followed a series of women who had represented India in world affairs as ambassadors and representatives to international bodies and conventions.

At home too, she symbolized the principles of gender equality repeated throughout India’s Constitution, which called for non-discrimination and at the same time acknowledged the need for remedies to achieve it. For example, Article 15 on Fundamental Rights prohibited discrimination based on sex (see Chapter 1) and also prohibited discrimination based on sex. Yet, it made clear that its declaration did not ‘prevent the State from making any special provisions for women and children’ (see Chapter 1). Consequently, the Indian Government established some programmes specifically to benefit women and advanced their particular interests in jobs, such as mining, in which they faced particular exploitation.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India was established by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare in 1971. Its charge was to evaluate women’s status in light of their guaranteed rights in the Constitution and to propose means to ‘enable women to play their full and proper role in building up the nation’ (Toward Equality, 1975: 2). While the impetus for forming the committee grew out of domestic concerns, it also responded to a call of the United Nations to examine the status of women worldwide. The committee, which included academics, politicians, and social workers, brought into the discussion other professionals, for example in medicine and law, to examine diverse aspects of women’s lives in India. The extensive work, touring the country to interview a variety of people and holding hearings, provided benchmark data on a grand scale.

The idea of ‘status’, since the word was present in the title of the committee, required early definition and the committee recognized status as relational and dependent on context. So, for example, it studied women’s relative power and responsibilities in families, but also the different issues relating to power and gender roles in the workforce. Given its broad remit, the committee ended the report with recommended measures to improve women’s economic, political, and social status in specific but sweeping terms.

The discussion of education in the report revealed the subtlety of the committee’s analysis. Using data on girls’ enrolment in school in the first three decades of independence, the report showed gradual increases in girls attending school, not only in absolute terms (from 6 million to 30 million) but also relative to the number of boys – from 33 girls to each 100 boys in the 1950s to 54 to each 100 in 1971. Yet, despite these marginal gains, the report also disaggregated the data, showing that girls dropped out of school more often and earlier than boys did and that the disparities between girls and boys were greater in rural than urban areas. In this regard, the committee proposed, as a high priority, to redouble efforts to increase the access of girls and women to education (Toward Equality, 1975: 152).

Two areas in which the effects of the report became obvious in the following decades were in debates about sex-ratios of girls to boys and in proposals about women’s political representation. The report turned greater attention to the sex-ratio issue; i.e., the decreasing number of girls in the population relative to the number of boys. Amanya Sen and other economists kept the problem in the news and subsequent studies used the report as a basis from which to begin their analysis. Second, in terms of political representation, the report lent support to arguments for mandated representation of women in governing bodies, an idea that gained popularity when Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister in 1984. Although the report did not advocate reservations for women in the manner that existed for Scheduled Castes and Tribes (see Chapter 1), it reinforced arguments about the necessity of increasing numbers of women in decision-making bodies.

The timing of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India was both fortuitous, coinciding with international attention to women's
issues and thereby promoting further study, and unfortunate, coming just at
the beginning of the Emergency. Its initial influence produced an increase in
ongoing research and the creation and expansion of institutions to study
women's development. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)
published a synopsis of the report in 1975 to reach a larger audience. The
report was reprinted again in 1988 (ICSSR Synopsis, 1988). At the same time
the ICSSR established an advisory committee on women's studies and the
momentum increased for the establishment and support of other institutions,
including the Centres for the Study of Women and Development and Centre
for Advanced Research in Women's Studies (Forbes, 1996: 228).

However, during the Emergency, and the period of changing govern-
ments that followed, the proposals addressed in Toward Equality did not
receive extensive government attention. Not until the late 1980s did the
report's analysis of the issue of reservations for women in government gain
active interest in the context of legislation revamping local government. The
Committee did not go so far as to back reservations for women in public
office, rather it provided the text for compelling arguments on both sides
and decided that there was insufficient evidence to make the call (Doc. 29,
pp. 158–9). Therefore, it became an important resource for public debate.
Finally in 1992, when legislation passed for establishing local governing
bodies in all states, called the Panchayat Raj Act, it contained reservations
for women in those bodies. By 2001 there were nearly two million women
serving in local government.

CONCLUSION

The study of history inevitably reveals the interconnectedness of events
and movements—politics, culture, and society. Here we see that agricultural
change in the 1970s, the Bangladesh war, and the Anti-Price Rise Movement
were in many ways linked. The war that divided Pakistan was India's history
too, even before India intervened militarily, and the politics of the war and
the policies of Indira Gandhi's Congress Party both effected and were
affected by popular movements.

The actions of the Indian Government from 1965 to 1975 revealed a new
nation, powerful and assertive in its approach to foreign policy and domestic
issues. But the mirror image of Indira Gandhi's administrative boldness and
real policy accomplishments was growing discontent that coalesced into mass
movements. Development neither moved quickly enough, nor equivalently
enough, to meet the expectations of most Indians. As a result, despite the
successes of the Green Revolution or the war with Pakistan (and sometimes
because of these successes) popular protest accelerated toward the middle of
the decade. Maoist rebels were the most extreme response to inequality in
the countryside, but Jaya Prakash Narayani's followers also called for social
justice and redemption of the promises of independence.

That the Green Revolution and the Total Revolution emerged concur-
rently signalled some of the ways in which Indira Gandhi's government had
lost touch with grassroots politics in the 1970s. The government did not (at
least immediately) reap political benefits from increased agricultural produc-
tion. The war with Pakistan had turned Mrs. Gandhi's attention outward and
her success in consolidating control within the Congress Party had quieted
any voices of disagreement among her advisors. The next chapter will look
more closely at the consequences of this severe disjuncture between the
highest politicians in a democracy and the people who elected them to serve.
In 1975, plagued by unrest and the assertion of a political opposition, Indira
Gandhi declared an Emergency, suspending civil liberties and arresting
opposition forces.
Democratic watersheds

Headline: *New York Times*, Friday 27 June 1975:

INDIA REPORTS 676 ARRESTS IN DRIVE ON THOSE OPPOSED TO REGIME OF MRS. GANDHI; 'THREAT' IS CITED Prime Minister Says a Conspiracy Forced New Delhi to Act NEW DELHI CITES A GRAVE 'THREAT' Disorders Around Country Said to Have Preceded State of Emergency

So reported an American newspaper when Indira Gandhi declared a `State of Emergency' on Thursday, 26 June 1975. The Emergency refers to a twenty-one month period of rule by decree, in which the prime minister took on extraordinary powers, which she argued was necessary to advance economic development, increase efficiency, arrest corruption in government, and forestall rebellions. In retrospect it is most remembered for the grave political excesses of the government throughout its duration.

Both scholars and journalists writing about India’s Emergency (1975–77) often address it in terms of its meaning for India’s democracy. This can be seen in three ways. First of all, by declaring a state of emergency, Indira Gandhi was not only imposing a series of decrees that suspended civil liberties, but also suspended the democratic process; scheduled elections were postponed and the opposition silenced. Second, as Chapter 4 demonstrated, the exuberance of democracy in the early 1970s – even peaceful public expression of dissent, demands for accountability, and popular mobilization – contributed to Mrs. Gandhi’s sense of threat. Finally, in retrospect, many observers claim that the way in which the Emergency ended – with the call for new elections in January of 1977 – heralded the ultimate victory of democracy in India.

This chapter looks at a series of watersheds in Indian politics, particularly in relation to the Emergency, in order to understand the depth and tenacity of democratic impulses in India. The Emergency, its justification, the experience of authoritarianism and its end with the 1977 election, tested and redefined Indian democracy.

Some consequences included the end of the political dominance of the Congress Party. It also realigned constituencies and interest groups and tested the resilience of non-elected institutions – the Election Commission, the Supreme Court, and the Press. The second half of this chapter traces two very different political movements that benefited from this realignment and weakening of the Congress Party: the rise of the so-called Backward Classes and the rise of Hindu nationalism as a political force.

THE EMERGENCY

In modern India’s political history, the Emergency is both central and ignored. As a recent book by Emma Tarlo suggests, ‘so much has it slipped out of public discourse that today it is remembered if at all, for the extent to which it has been forgotten’. Tarlo, in fact, cites a newspaper essay by the sociologist Ashis Nandy, in which he says: ‘Enormous political effort has gone into wiping out the Emergency as living memory’ (Tarlo, 2001: 21). In this, the Emergency shares with the Partition the desire – on the part of many of those harmed by it – to forget the past (Buitelaar, 2000). In each case it was national trauma with extensive and diffused ramifications of violence and personal upheaval.

However, a consequence of this non-remembrance, and of the political excesses such as censorship that characterized the Emergency, is that there are not the usual sources to elaborate it. Nevertheless, here is an attempt to summarize the period and events commonly referred to by the name: ‘Emergency’.

The provisions for the ‘Emergency’ lay in Article 352 of the Constitution, which gave power to the President, in the case of a ‘grave’ threat to the nation, to issue a Proclamation of Emergency. Its effect would be to extend executive powers to the Union or any officer of the Union as necessary to meet the threat. At Indira Gandhi’s request the President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed issued such an order and Indira Gandhi took on the executive powers of the state (Constitution, Article 352–353).

During the Emergency Indira Gandhi’s government jailed her opponents, muzzled dissent, and imposed draconian measures on the people in the name of development. With the assistance – and, many argue, at the instigation – of her son, Sanjay Gandhi, whose political career reached its apex at the time, Indira Gandhi implemented programmes to generate greater efficiency in government industries, stall population growth, and improve the appearance of cities. Like so much in the Emergency these positively described
programmes had negative or dire consequences. They imposed arbitrary and strict timetables on workers, forced sterilization of thousands of people, and cleared slums that were home to millions of poor citizens. Further, with the opposition under arrest and the press censored, there were no checks on these excesses.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE EMERGENCY

While Mrs. Gandhi was contending with the effects of mass political mobilizations (such as the JP Movement) and an increasingly vocal opposition, the Allahabad High Court on 12 June 1973 delivered another blow. In a long drawn-out election dispute brought by her defeated opponent, Raj Narain, the Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha ruled that Mrs. Gandhi’s election in 1971 was invalid because she had violated several election rules. Specifically, she used government workers to erect a platform for one of her speeches in her constituency. Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha announced his judgement after a careful hearing that went to great lengths to adjust to the unusual circumstances of a prime minister in the courtroom, including special provisions for security and concerns about protocol in the court (Malhotra, in The Hindu, 19 March 2008).

In response to the judgement, Mrs. Gandhi refused to relinquish her seat in Parliament and in less than two weeks declared a State of Emergency in the nation. In her address to the nation on All India Radio on 26 June 1973 about the Emergency she did not mention the court case. Rather she laid out the circumstances for which Emergency measures were required as threats to the internal stability of the nation. She referred to ‘false allegations’ against her personally, but put the argument for the Emergency in the context of needed centralized powers, not for herself but for the institution of prime minister. She said, ‘we have learned of a new programme challenging law and order throughout the country with a view to disrupt normal functioning’. Therefore, she argued that ‘the nation’s integrity demands firm action’. She suggested that the current climate invited the possibility of an external attack and also threatened agricultural production and the prospects of economic advancement. At the end of her address she promised to announce a new programme for economic development and asked for continued cooperation and trust in the future.

Meanwhile, she jailed her opposition, including the ailing Jaya Prakash Narayan, confirming that she found his movement for Total Revolution particularly threatening. Not only had JP called for electoral reforms and land rights, but he attracted a growing following even beyond the student movement in Bihar, from which it began. In fact, on the day he was arrested, he was set to address a rally of young people engaged in the movement.
Plate 2 Nek Chand Garden
Author's own

Plate 3 1984 Congress Party election poster
Plate 4a Stamp depicting Jayaprakash Narayan
Copyright © 1996–2010, Kumar’s Potpourri. All Rights Reserved

Plate 4b Stamp marking 25 years of Indian independence
Copyright © 1996–2010, Kumar’s Potpourri. All Rights Reserved
ININDIA'S PRESIDENT TO BE
SWORN IN TODAY
New Cabinet To Take
Charge This Evening
LIKELY ALLOCATION OF PORTFOLIOS

CONGRATULATIONS
Robbery Bid
Failed

LESS INTAKE OF JUTE
AND COTTON
Import-Export Budget For
Half-Year

PARLIAMENT SESSION
BEGINS TODAY
Crop Of Official Bills
For 12-Week Agenda

Plate 6 The Times of India, 13 May, 1952
Copyright © 2011, Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

Plate 7 Meera Mukherjee's 'Spirit of Daily Work'
The Museum of Modern Art, New Delhi
Over the time of the Emergency, opponents from left and right met the similar fate of jail and suppression. In this regard, Indira Gandhi used the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), which was manipulated to arrest politicians who attempted to advocate citizens’ rights or simply opposed her. Gayatri Devi, of the royal family of Jaipur, and Vijay Raje Scindia, of the house of Gwalior, who were both popular women politicians, whose careers advocated a multi-party system and who belong to conservative right-oriented parties, were sent to jail. George Fernandes, an MP and labour leader who presided over a massive rail strike, was also arrested. In addition, a young activist, who later became an important politician, Laloo Prasad Yadav, was arrested as well. While in jail, his wife gave birth to a daughter, whom he named ‘Misa’, as a sign of defiance.

Newspapers submitted to censorship or were closed. Several papers continued to publish and brought the action of censors to their readers’ attention by distributing papers with blacked out or cut out stories. Other journalists, including Raj Thakur and Ramesh Thakur, of the magazine Seminar simply closed their papers down (Thakur, 1991). Salman Rushdie’s novel Midnight’s Children, written just after the Emergency, creates a palpable image of this silencing. The narrator, Saleem, whose life is magically linked to the history of India, because of his birth at the moment of independence, had a son, born at the moment of the Emergency. The baby, Aadam, was ‘a child of a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody ever managed to put it together again’. Significant to his time of birth, Aadam, whose ears were so large and keen that he heard the history around him, did not utter a sound. His inheritance from the Emergency was that he was completely silent (Rushdie, 2006: 482).

The silencing of a free press, and censorship of other kinds, did not curtail all cultural expression. Interestingly, one of India’s most popular films of all time was released during the Emergency – ‘Sholay’. Although produced in 1974 before the Emergency, it portrayed an irreverent critique of authority – the government and the police. The heroes of the film, including actor Amitabh Bachchan, are kind-hearted thieves. One of their antagonists – a jailor – provides the comic role of the clown, determined to impose discipline. He says to the prisoners, ‘I have been a jailor since British times and I do not believe in reform’. ‘I have not changed and I know you will not change.’ In Chaplinesque form, he wears a Hitler moustache and walks in goosessteps, comically tripping down the steps to the prison yard. Ultimately he is outfoxed by our jailed heroes, who are the honourable characters of the film. ‘Sholay’ was released on Independence Day, 15 August 1975 and for the next two years it sold out cinemas throughout the country, including the Plaza in New Delhi, not far from the centre of government.

Other films produced during the Emergency did succumb to the consequences of censorship. ‘Kissa Kursi Ka’ (What kind of Chair), was a political
satire on the government containing fairly obvious ridicule of Sanjay Gandhi. Produced by a Congress Party MP, Amrit Naha, the film was not only censored, but all copies destroyed. Later "Kissa Kuri Ka" became the subject of a court suit, in which the Minister of Information and Broadcasting during the Emergency was arrested. However, Naha disavowed the film and made amends with his party.

Meanwhile, Indira Gandhi's repressive actions converged with her pronouncement about promised economic development. On 1 July 1975, she revealed a twenty-point programme to improve the economy [Doc. 30, pp. 139–60]. It proposed measures to attack inflation, provide land to labourers, increase agricultural wages, and promote home spun industries. About eight months later, Sanjay Gandhi proposed a five-point programme to address social issues. He called for party workers to help transform society through increasing literacy, promoting environmental awareness, and advocating social change. His five points—which were disseminated in a variety of media—took the form of slogans for good citizenship:

1. Each one teach one;
2. Plant a tree;
3. Eliminate dowry;
4. Plan your family; and
5. Remove caste.

As a main tactic to promote these policies, Indira Gandhi advocated order and efficiency. Slogans about arriving at work on time and increasing productivity covered walls, billboards, and other public areas. But the most controversial and ultimately most disastrous programmes associated with the Emergency were efforts for the beautification of Delhi and the promotion of family planning, both with innocuous names and sinister consequences. The beautification of Delhi brought destruction to slum colonies that displaced hundreds of thousands of citizens. Communities of labourers were driven out of the city to camps, while their huts were destroyed to make room for development in Delhi. Living in camps outside the city, they now had to commute into Delhi for daily labour. And as the Shah Commission, which evaluated the consequences of the Emergency, reported, this disproportionately affected Muslim communities, especially around the Kashmiri Gate neighbourhood [Doc. 31, pp. 160–1].

The family planning programmes promoted sterilization, giving government workers targets for the number of sterilizations they should accomplish in a given month. As a result, the system prompted large-scale coercion. In a wide-ranging series of interviews, Emma Tarlo has shown that many citizens acquiesced to sterilization in order to gain access to "basic civic amenities, such as work, housing, hospital treatment and education" (Tarlo, 2003: 176) [Doc. 32, pp. 161–2]. The implementation of these programmes, especially in an atmosphere that restricted free speech and public dissent, magnified the already appalling consequences and provoked powerful resentment and frustration among the people. In moving ways, the novelist Rabin Roy Mistry, in A Fine Balance, captures the capriciousness and tragedy of these campaigns, when he untangles the roles of all the various players from political bosses to government workers to local doctors and forced patients. He shows how all of them are caught up in power struggles, corruption, and lack of access to information (Mistry, 1995).

The independence of the judiciary was also challenged. For example, the High Court in Delhi overturned the detention of the Indian Express journalist, Kuldeep Nayar, who had been arrested during the first days of the Emergency. After a series of such rulings, Justice S. Ranganathan was transferred to Gauhati in the far northeast of the country and Justice R. N. Agarwal was made a session's judge.

Jaya Prakash Narayan continued to record his dissent in a diary from jail and letters to Mrs. Gandhi and other politicians. He was released after four months of imprisonment and published his diary clandestinely in 1976. A. K. Gopalan, an MP and leader of the Communist Party, was also arrested in West Bengal and later released. He immediately made his way to Delhi and reported his experiences and critique of the Emergency in a powerful speech in Parliament. However, his speech was not published outside of Parliament at the time [Doc. 33, pp. 162–3]. Central to his concern was the support that the Emergency seemed to have from the Soviet Union and from the CPI because of its Soviet ties. He wanted to separate himself as a Communist and a democrat from the draconian measures of the Emergency.

But the weight of censorship—that suppressed Gopalan's voice—continued to increase the anxiety produced by the Emergency itself, and the lack of open communication seemed to work in both directions. The government seemed to become more and more out of touch with the increasing discontent. Perhaps as a miscalculation, in January 1977, Indira Gandhi, convinced that a good monsoon and stable prices heralded the Emergency's success, called for fresh elections. Commentators have spent much time and print wondering what finally prompted Indira Gandhi to announce elections. Some have argued that she ultimately believed in democracy and wanted the mandate of the people. It also may have been the case that she took the advice of politicians around her, who would not have contradicted her if she anticipated winning. Another theory holds that the Intelligence Bureau's analysis gave the impression of a victory. While she may not have heard criticism from inside India, the world press certainly lambasted her policies— with titles like 'Democracy in Eclipse' or the accusation in the Times of a
leaders, including an ailing JP and other opposition leaders. Such election rallies served also as a cathartic release of twenty-one months of political tension.

In the end the Congress achieved only 154 seats in Parliament to the Janata’s clear majority of 295 (Singh and Bose, 1986: 151). Mrs. Gandhi lost her own constituency of Rae Bareli with only 37 per cent to her old rival, Raj Narain’s, 53 per cent. Sanjay Gandhi lost in Amethi constituency 34 per cent to his opponents 60 per cent (Election Commission, 1977). Across the north, voters completely routed the Indian National Congress. George Fernandes, the trade union leader, won his election by 78 per cent even though he could not campaign because he was still in jail. JP remained an important symbol of the Janata victory, though he was too ill to participate. The government issued a stamp in his memory (see Plate 4).

LEGACIES OF THE JANATA GOVERNMENT

In retrospect the Janata Party Government, which held power from 1977 to 1980, heralded the development of a successful multi-party system in India and promoted a range of interests — often, conflicting ones — among its constituent parties. However, at the time, its failings, particularly its inability to show a united front, stood out most prominently. The Janata coalition accepted Morari Desai, as prime minister. Desai, a Gandhian, often described as spiritual and eccentric, was in fact an experienced politician. He served as deputy prime minister to Indira Gandhi in 1967 until his more conservative wing of the Congress Party was split away by Mrs. Gandhi. An outspoken opponent of her government, he was jailed during the Emergency. His 1977 campaign both in his own constituency of Surat in Gujarat and throughout the country sided the Janata victory.

Several policy shifts took place during the Janata regime. George Fernandes, as Minister of Industries, pursued an aggressive trade policy that promoted Indian corporations, through protectionist trade policies. Using the term ‘swadeshi,’ meaning one’s own country and evoking the same word used in the Freedom Movement, the policies expelled both Coca-Cola and IBM for not relinquishing enough control to Indian partners. The government initiated a high level commission to evaluate unequal development among so-called Backward Castes — a measure designed to implement the social principles, which Desai, echoing Mahatma Gandhi, advocated. In a similar vein, Charan Singh, as Home Minister and later Finance Minister, pursued his primary interest in land reform that had been a hallmark of his whole political career. In fact, when Desai’s government floundered, Charan Singh became the new prime minister.
A key issue that divided the Desai government was the prospect of giving RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) dual membership in the Janata. The RSS had been implicated in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi; it had been banned in 1948 and again in 1967 and 1969 during the emergency. It was known for its pro-Hindu stance and particularly its mobilisation of Hindu youth into organized brigades. In addition, it functioned as a service organization that aided in times of disaster. It was associated with the Jan Sangh, which was part of the Janata Party in 1977 and provided a training camp for cadres – not only for their own work, but for the Jan Sangh as well. That members of an organization on the extreme (or Hindu) right were part of the Janata coalition along with the secular socialist groups demonstrated the internal challenges facing such a diverse party.

So, in July of 1978, unable to accommodate the right, left, and centre, Morarji Desai resigned. Charan Singh then formed a new coalition with a Congress faction led by Indira Gandhi (who had won an interim election to come back to Parliament), making him prime minister. Mrs. Gandhi, however, withdrew her support within six months, forcing new elections. In 1980, therefore, India held its Seventh General Election. This time the Congress Party won a majority, ending Janata rule and Mrs. Gandhi returned as Prime Minister. As a consequence of this turnaround, some scholars and politicians dismissed what they call 'the Janata interlude' as a brief exception to longer-term Congress rule (The Pioneer, 27 May 2003). Commentator and politician, Arun Shourie, in fact, titled his book about the post-1980 period, Mrs. Gandhi's Second Reign (Shourie, 1984). However, there were long term consequences of the Janata Government, which emerged in state politics and national movements outlined below:

Much of the legislative and judicial efforts during the Janata regime were directed toward undoing the emergency. For example, Parliament overruled the 42nd Amendment that had allowed Indira Gandhi to justify Emergency Powers, such as restricting the independence of the courts and allowing wide scale detention of dissidents. The 43rd and 44th Amendments repealed those provisions and guaranteed the right of the Supreme Court and the high courts of the states to rule on the Constitutionality of legislation. These Amendments also assured that the rights of life and liberty of the individual supersedes other interests of the state.

Politically as well, the Janata Government left several lasting legacies. For example, it gave opposition leaders experience in government that enhanced their ability to engage in high-level politics in the future. The constituent organizations of the coalition, including the right wing Jan Sangh, set their sights on access to future power. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a Jan Sangh leader, who was the Foreign Minister in the Janata Government, led this group - renamed the Bharatiya Janata Party - to victory over a decade later. Ultimately, Vajpayee himself became prime minister in the 1990s.

CONSEQUENCE OF JANATA DEMOCRACY IN THE STATES

The Janata Government also initiated new state elections, on the assumption that the Centre had imposed undue pressures on state politics. Therefore, the new government reasoned, here too voters deserved the right to reconsider their government and vote again. This section will look at three examples with very different consequences – Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Kashmir. By and large most states in the Legislative Assembly elections of 1977 overturned Congress-led governments in preference to regional and opposition parties. But these three examples demonstrate that regional movements for autonomy, perhaps exacerbated under Indira Gandhi's Congress rule, but also suppressed, became explicit in the elections of 1977. This section also traces the very different trajectories that those movements took. As a result each story begins during the Janata Government (1977–79) but demonstrates the ongoing consequences after 1980, when the Congress Party returned to power.

Tamil Nadu was an interesting case, however, because the Tamil Nadu state government controlled by the regionalist DMK – Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Party – had been dismissed by Mrs. Gandhi in 1977 before the elections. The DMK had a long history of advocacy for regional political autonomy and the advancement of Tamil culture. It generated enthusiasm in 1967 for an anti-Hindi language platform and won state elections in 1977. The DMK was accused of corruption by a rival party, the breakaway ADMK – the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Party (though simply called ADMK at the time). While both parties opposed the Emergency and their leaders were arrested under MISA regulations, they played off against each other using national figures – including Indira Gandhi and Janata leaders such as L. K. Advani to fight the 1977 elections. Therefore the 1977 election in Tamil Nadu focused on regional controversies, albeit with national overtones. The AIADMK benefited from the leadership of M. G. Ramachandran, a film legend, who actually was the first of several actors to rise to significant political power. The AIADMK (as the 'All India' in its name might suggest) was also less concerned with Tamil autonomy and more willing to work with first the Indian National Congress and then the Janata Government at the Centre. The extreme separatism, which worried political analysts thought would develop in Tamil Nadu, did not take place. The Tamil Nadu parties played a critical role as power-brokers in future coalition governments at the Centre.

In both Punjab and Kashmir, however, the 1977 state assembly elections represented a democratic watershed in which regional parties asserted their aspirations. In both places, separatist movements gained new force pursuing a more dangerous political path than Tamil Nadu. In Punjab the election of
1977 broke the recent lock the Congress Party held over state politics when the regional Akali Dal Party won 58 seats (out of 117) and formed a government with the support of the Janata Party, which had won 25 seats. Many people had hoped that the Akali Dal, with a strong hand and an alliance with the ruling Janata Party would bring more autonomy and development to Punjab. When this did not happen, a more militant separatist movement gained momentum in Punjab.

The Akali Dal, which means ‘Eternal Party’, was founded to represent the interests of Sikhs in India. An old organization with roots in the 1920s, it advocated the rights of the Sikh religious community and in the pre-independence elections, just as Muslims received separate electorates (constituencies), so did the Sikhs. Sikhism is a monothestic faith that emerged in India from Bhakti movements – spiritual practices focused on personal devotion to the divine – in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Founded by Guru Nanak (1469–1539), one of the leading Bhakti teachers, Sikhism attracted a strong following in the region of contemporary Punjab. Sikh Gurus served both as worldly and spiritual leaders, shaping the subsequent states in Punjab and later proving to be formidable foes to the British Empire. In fact, Britain failed to conquer Punjab until 1848.

In the post-independence period, Sikhs fought for increased autonomy in their region and won in 1966 a separate state, by further subdividing Punjab into a largely Sikh, Punjabi-speaking state which keeps the name Punjab and a largely Hindu Hindi-speaking state, which took on the name Haryana. But issues remained unresolved, such as returning the city of Chandigarh, which now served as a union territory and capital to both Punjab and Haryana, exclusively to Punjab. There were also issues of including some additional Punjabi-speaking districts in Punjab and increased autonomy. The Akali Dal supported these efforts and other political and religious goals as outlined in what came to be known as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (the 1978 agreement reached by Sikh leaders at the city of Anandpur Sahib, during this time the Akali Dal came to power as the largest party in a coalition government, so there was great optimism that the proposals of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution might be addressed [Doc. 34, pp. 163-4].

However, the Akali Dal government did not directly or immediately act on these interests and instead focused on internal battles among Sikh groups. Such conflict grew more assertive over time. At the same time – around 1977 – a Sikh leader, Sant Jailmal Singh Bhindranwale, called for reforms within the Sikh community or Khals and for a separate homeland for Sikhs – Khalistan. The disunity among Sikhs was apparent in the various organizations and factions engaged in conflict – sometimes violently – to exercise their political power. They were associated also with different political parties or branches of the Akali Dal. ‘In other words’, as the political scientist, Paul Brass, put it, ‘the parties in Punjab do not simply reflect basic religious and caste antagonisms, but they divide and deflect them’ (Brass, 1974, 397).

The Sikh separatist movement gained momentum and, some scholars argue, support from the Congress Party, which saw division among Sikh political groups as an opening to return to power. Robin Jeffrey, for example, suggests that Congress, in fact supported Bhindranwale at first, an irony because the militant nature of the movement had dire consequences for Congress, the nation, and Indira Gandhi. By the time Congress returned to power in 1980, the unrest in Punjab was a major issue on Indira Gandhi’s agenda. When in February 1980 the Congress Government declared President’s rule in Punjab and dismissed the Akali Dal Government, the actions elicited widespread public sympathy. Bhindranwale’s followers openly called for Khalistan and support came, not only from Sikhs in India, but many abroad as well, including large Sikh populations in Canada, Britain, and the United States.

In the 1980s three events in succession demonstrated the magnitude of the situation – Operation Blue Star, Indira Gandhi’s assassination, and the explosion of an Air India flight. In March 1984, when Sant Bhindranwale perceived a threat from the government, he and his followers began occupying and fortifying the holiest of Sikh temples, the Golden Temple in Amritsar. After a three-month stand off, during which violence in the Punjab continued to escalate – attacks on Hindu civilians and targeted assassinations of the military’s opponents – Indira Gandhi sent armed troops into the Temple complex. The assault, code named Operation Blue Star, intended to quickly flush out the militants inside. However, since the followers of Bhindranwale were well-armed and many were former soldiers, the siege took three days, inflicting considerable damage and loss of life. The symbolic significance of having attacked Sikhism’s holiest shrine was as considerable as the death toll, which the government estimated at 83 soldiers and 492 people in the Temple (militants or bystanders). Other estimates are much higher and in addition to the dead and injured, hundreds of people were arrested.

The consequences of the operation were broad and deep. Played out on television, the effect among Sikhs was a visual violation of their faith. It fuelled distrust in government and a sense of alienation from the Indian state. Even among those who had not supported Bhindranwale, he was now perceived with sympathy. The news of the events created a stronger bond for the considerable Sikh diaspora and served as a tool for mobilizing financial support from abroad.

For Indira Gandhi, the operation was a success. She had dealt a serious blow to the militants in the Punjab. In the mean time her intelligence officers received credible threats that her life was in danger. She too seemed to take the threats seriously and, possibly, with resignation. In a speech she delivered in October in the state of Orissa (in Eastern India) she said, ‘I do not care
whether I live or die. . . And when my life ends, I can say that every drop of my blood will keep India alive and strengthen it.” [Doc. 35, p. 164]. Then prophetically, on 31 October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

Tragically, her death was followed by riots in Delhi in which the Sikh community were victims of the anger of her supporters and mourners. The rioting seemed to be orchestrated in some way or facilitated by Congress Party activists. Many Sikhs fled the capital and others hid. There were also rumours of broader disaster — that the Delhi water supply had been poisoned — but, if so, by whom. Rumours escalated the anxiety and violence. From rooftops, one could see fires, selectively set, where mobs had attacked Sikh homes. The government was slow to respond and estimates were of thousands dead in the two days before Rajiv Gandhi (her successor as prime minister) called out the army. In a bold political move, Rajiv Gandhi called general elections immediately to legitimize his own position as prime minister. Indira Gandhi’s memory and her last speech became an important symbol of that election [Doc. 36, pp. 164–5].

It seemed that each action produced another painful reaction. So it was that eight months later the next tragedy occurred: the destruction of Air India Flight 182 off the coast of Ireland. The flight, having left Toronto some hours earlier, exploded from bombs packed in suitcases of non-existent passengers. The 327 passengers were primarily Canadians as well — tourists and families, Sikhs and non-Sikhs, travelling to India for holiday or to visit relatives. It was one of the largest such disasters of its time, both in terms of aviation deaths and certainly in terms of loss of civilian Canadian lives. Given evidence from the flight, the timing of events, and the fact that some potential passengers named Singh (a common Sikh surname) had made bogus reservations, authorities assumed the responsibility of Sikh militants. An investigation followed and some suspects were caught and tried, but the process took 20 years to complete and still was inconclusive. The Canadian Government launched a further Commission of Inquiry in 2006.

By the time the jetliner was attacked, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was negotiating peace with Akali Dal leaders in Punjab. In fact such peace processes were numerous and conflict in Punjab continued on and off for nearly a decade. Although Rajiv Gandhi formed a Commission to investigate anti-Sikh violence after his mother’s assassination, its results, which did not set blame with any political groups, were met with scepticism. Nine more commissions were established in the next 20 years to examine aspects of the riots. What seemed to ease the violence in the long run, however, was the increasing prosperity of the region. A key beneficiary of the Green Revolution, Punjab turned the wealth of agricultural productivity into economic gain in other areas as well, such as food processing, pharmaceuticals, leather goods. Government investment in infrastructure, such as electricity and roads, facilitated families’ investment in better housing and other goods. In the 1990s, it also benefited as a destination for multinational corporations, again, attracted to its prosperity.

The third example of state government change in 1977 was to Kashmir, where too there was a separatist movement as well as conflict with Pakistan. The subject or subtext of wars and conflict, Kashmir symbolized for India its multiculturalism, tolerance, and secularism, even when those concepts did not seem to thrive in Kashmir itself. All the more significant then that Morarji Desai, the Janata prime minister, insisted on free and open elections in Kashmir in 1977.

The result of the elections was that Sheikh Abdullah’s National Conference Party won a very large victory. Sheikh Abdullah had once been an ally of Indira Gandhi’s Congress Party, but returned in 1977 to his more independent roots. His National Conference Party won 47 of 75 in an election, for which the Centre supplied security and voter turnout was especially high. In fact the period from about 1977 to about 1989 was one of relative calm in Kashmir and the 1983 election also was characterized by little corruption (Ganguly, 1996). The violent separatist movements of the earlier period and Pakistan-supported movements for accession experienced a lull. As Stanley Widmalm, in Kashmir in Comparative Perspective put it, democracy seemed to mitigate violent separatism. As evidence he presents interviews with militants abroad, who found fewer recruits during this period (Widmalm, 2002).

The renewed militancy in the 1990s included tactics such as kidnappings and assassinations and the Indian armed forces and police responded with force. International conflict took a formidable turn in 1999, when infiltrators from Pakistan — some Kashmiri in origin and some not, crossed into the Kargil region. By the time the Indian Army had been alerted (by local shepherds, in fact) Pakistani troops had occupied a number of peaks overlooking the important Srinagar to Leh road. Indian and Pakistani troops once again met on the border and with the help of India air power, India recaptured 900 miles of a strategic ridge, peak by peak. The Kargil conflict ended when Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif withdrew, after finding a face-saving solution from the United States, which promised to look into the Kashmir situation. India lost 527 soldiers and had 1300 wounded. Pakistani estimates are more difficult to find and were not published by the government, but the range of estimates, even from among Pakistani army officers, go from 350 to as much as 4000. Part of the question has to do with whether soldiers refers to regular army or supporting militia.

In India, the end of the conflict brought a patriotic upsurge, as the returning army and the fallen soldiers were feted and commemorated. Even the stock market rose precipitously that same week. Ramchandra Guha argues that an unintended consequence of the war was a nationalist response in
Punjab, of course, another border region. According to Guha, “Farmers along the border insisted that if conflict became a full-fledged war, they would be on hand to assist the Indian Army, providing food and shelter” (Guha, 2007). For Kashmiris, the strategic importance of their state meant a constant pressure of army occupation that did not end with the Kargil conflicts.

As the state politics of Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Kashmir show, trends toward separatism and integration vary over time, as do the responses from the Centre. In terms of the Janata Government, one of its main contributions was not only representing the potential of democracy as a means to political and social change, but facilitating participation in that democratic process, both at the national and regional levels.

In addition to seeing this in separatist movements, several other political interests found voice and political experience through the Janata Government’s brief tenure. Two particular interest groups that came to characterize Indian politics for the next decade benefited from the high profile support of key players in the Janata regime: namely, the Other Backward Classes (OBC) movement and the Hindu nationalist movement. The next sections of this chapter will discuss these two movements, which, though they had a much longer history, earned an electoral boost and new ways to articulate their politics from the Janata experience. It focuses on two particular narratives that came out of the post-Janata period—the implementation of reservations for groups called Other Backward Classes and the aggressive assertion of Hindu nationalist interests around the issue of building a temple in Ayodhya, a town in Uttar Pradesh.

BACKWARD CLASSES AND THE JANATA GOVERNMENT

In 1978, the Janata Government, which had received strong support from rural voters and other poorer constituencies, appointed a commission to examine the economic deficiencies among certain social castes. Although the Indian Census stopped categorizing people according to caste, it was clear in the 1970s that Brahmins and other upper castes dominated government service and institutions of higher education, especially in the north. The south had experienced anti-Brahman movements—in fact the DMK in Tamil Nadu had its origins in those—which had the effect of creating a broader distribution of opportunities in terms of caste. While India’s Constitution established reservations and special provisions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and about 20 per cent of Parliament comprised members of those communities, there were no such mechanisms to incorporate various other communities into the Parliament. In the 1977 election, a number of people who identified themselves as coming from Backward Castes were elected to Parliament—by and large, these were people from non-Brahman and non-Scheduled communities.

Here the category of backward class/ caste requires some definition. It returns us to the discussion begun in Chapter 1 and extends it. As the anthropologist Gail Omvedt points out, “backward class” is a slightly misleading term that combines the interests of socially, as well as educationally, backward communities (Omvedt, 1990). In contemporary society certain jatis or castes, such as Brahmins or Kayasthas associated with literate occupations, benefited from elite status. For centuries they engaged in jobs that require education and accordingly received the education necessary. Landed communities and former rulers benefited from status connected to their wealth as did some merchant communities. As Chapter 1 demonstrates these castes gained additional advantages under British imperial rule (Bayly, 2001).

Upper castes had something of a monopoly on the best service jobs—those connected to government—and were disproportionately represented in the best educational institutions. Borrowing statistics from a group that advocated the rights of Dalits (Scheduled Castes and Tribes), Omvedt extrapolated that in 1981, 82 per cent of the jobs as chief executives of government-run corporations went to Brahmins and in the civil service and elected government the number ranged from 48 to 62 per cent (Omvedt, 1999). However, Brahmins comprised about 5 per cent of the population at the time. This disparity suggested that there was a class disability experienced by certain caste groups who had insufficient access to education and job opportunities.

This kind of disparity prompted the Janata Government in 1978 to propose a commission to examine the obstacles that might impede social mobility for people who were economically (class) and socially (caste) backward. India’s president selected Bindeshwar Prasad Mandal, an independent-minded politician from the state of Bihar, to chair a commission that would examine the interests and disabilities experienced by backward classes. Among the tasks of the commission was to conduct a nationwide study of 11 indicators of social, economic, and educational backwardness.

After two years of collecting a wide range of data, the commission concluded that a range of social and educational factors had indeed hindered the overall prosperity of OBCs (Other Backward Classes). The Report, carefully extrapolating from Census data, estimated that OBCs represented 52 per cent of the population, but had very little presence in government jobs and positions of leadership. The Report argued that these communities were disproportionately depressed economically and more prone to poverty than other groups because of their social and educational backwardness. Most
powerfully, it stated: ‘In a democratic set-up every individual and community has a legitimate right and aspiration to participate in the ruling of the country’ (Mandal, 1991: 62). Thereby, it appealed to an Indian sense of social justice.

The Report made a series of recommendations, but most prominent and most controversial among them was its call for reservations for Other Backward Classes in government service and educational institutions along the model that had existed for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. As the Report put it:

When a backward class candidate becomes a Collector or a Superintendent of Police, the paternal benefits accruing from this position are limited to the members of his family only. But the psychological spin-off of this phenomenon is tremendous, the entire community of that backward class candidate feels socially elevated.’

(Mandal, 1991: 62)

Therefore, the Commission proposed reservations for OBCs in the spheres in which the government had the ability to apply them, for example, in government jobs and education [Doc. 37, p. 165]. However, the Commission recognized that since so many OBCs lived in rural areas, the greater disability was their insufficient control over their land. Therefore it advocated an overhaul of tenancy agreements and widespread land reform. The story of the Mandal Commission, however, experienced a substantial interruption in 1980. When the Congress Party returned to power, the Report, like all Janata initiatives, was shelved for a decade.

The Mandal Commission Report re-emerged in 1990 during the National Front coalition government led by Prime Minister V. P. Singh of the Janata Dal. The Janata Dal (Dal means party) was not literally a reincarnation of the Janata Party of 1977, but it was a successor – comprised of members of that coalition – and it claimed to carry the mantle of the 1977 government and of the JP Movement before it. The Janata Dal particularly represented lower-case peasant cultivators. So it was perhaps not surprising that as soon as the National Front coalition gained power, it proposed to implement the reservations policy laid out by the Mandal Commission. No party was willing to oppose the Mandal Report publicly, but none of them wanted to enforce its recommendations either. For example, Rajiv Gandhi, former prime minister and then leader of the opposition, hedged the subject, saying ‘it would be very difficult to implement it and his party was for a national consensus on the issue’ (Times of India, 1991).

Immediately, anti-reservation protests emerged around the country and Mandal (which was the short-hand for the report and its controversy) became the key topic of debate among politicians and intellectuals, including in editorials satirical advertising, and cartoons [Doc. 38, pp. 165-8]. There were some violent demonstrations, including instances of destruction of government property. Particularly disturbing were cases of self-immolation by upper caste students, at least 13 cases in Lucknow, Delhi, and other major cities. The response prompted some commentators to suggest that the Mandal issue was encouraging caste war for the sake of votes. However, Asghar Ali Engineer, a scholar of Indian politics, in a powerful essay, made an impassioned argument for the implementation of the Mandal Report. ‘Mr. V. P. Singh while playing his politics has done something which will bring a ray of hope and sense of justice to the millions in our society which were cast at the periphery of our society’ (Engineer, 1991).

Significantly members of Backward Castes had been gaining power in the Janata Dal, V. P. Singh’s party, since 1977, and so the proposal for reservations was recognized, rather than proposed, their growing influence. In fact, Backward Caste leaders, such as Ram Lalbhai Singh Yadav, Malayar Singh Yadav, and Laloo Prasad Yadav represented a variety of parties often competing with one another, rather than cooperating. Like every story in this book, the rise of backward class politicians stretches back before Mandal or the Janata or even independence. Many of the backward classes were among peasants who organized for land against landlords in the 1930s and again in the 1950s. What was significant in the 1990s was the confluence of the power of certain OBC politicians, the influence of their supporters, the Janata Dal commitments, and the Mandal Commission report.

In any event, V. P. Singh’s proposal established new rhetoric in politics: the words Mandal, Mandalization, OBCs, backward castes and backward classes all became prominent terms in political debate. Mandalization became an invective from the opposition suggesting that the Janata Dal was pandering to backward caste interests. The slippage between backward caste and class was another significant issue. While the Mandal Commission Report focused on social disabilities based on caste as one of the obstacles OBCs had to overcome, it demonstrated that caste disabilities often coincided with class disabilities. More importantly, later court judgements required that the provisions to alleviate backwardness should especially apply to people disadvantaged by both caste and class.

The debates about the privilege of wealthy members of backward classes added another term to the political vocabulary – the creamy layer – and the Supreme Court ruled in 1992 that wealthy members of backward caste communities should be excluded from reservations (Indira Sawhney v. Union of India, 1992). By 1992, though, reservations were still controversial, OBCs had gained reservations in government jobs in most states, and they continued to increase their importance as a political constituency. However, because there were other political issues on the horizon, some opponents to Mandal sought
to change the subject. They considered backward class rights a distraction from another more heated and violence-inducing issue over the construction of a temple to Ram on the site of a 400-year-old mosque.

THE BJP AND THE MANDIR ISSUE

If the rise of interests of Backward Classes was an issue close to the constituents of the Janata Dal, the controversy over a mosque in the town of Ayodhya became a defining feature of the politics of the BJP (the Bharatiya Janata Party), another party that descended from the Janata Government of 1977. Founded in 1980, the BJP emphasized its commitment to challenging the complacency of Congress Party politics. As the new incarnation of the Jan Sangh, a party with strong roots in Hindu nationalism – i.e., politics that emphasized the cultural unity of Hindus and Hinduism’s centrality to the Indian state – the BJP sought to broaden appeal than its Jan Sangh antecedent. Under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who had been External Affairs Minister in the Janata Government, the BJP initially separated itself from the Hindu nationalist agenda of its correlated grassroots organizations; however, over time it returned to the ideology that had served as its foundation. This resulted in the BJP extending its support to the Sangh Parivar – the family of Hindu nationalist organizations, among which were the RSS (the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), the cadre base of the party, and the VHP (the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or World Hindu Congress). The VHP focused its mobilization efforts directly on religious issues.

Therefore, the rise of the BJP and especially its most potent political symbol, the movement to build a Ram temple (mandir) on the site on which a sixteenth century mosque currently stood, presents a chronological parallel to the Backward Class politics. Both issues – designated in the press as Mandir/Mandal – took turns gaining headlines in the daily papers and determined the fortunes of a number of politicians.

In order to understand the complexity of the BJP’s political reality, we must put the Mandir issue into the context of its importance to the religious organization, the VHP. In the 1980s, the VHP had asserted a number of pro-Hindu agendas. One was a push to ‘re-convert’ former members of Scheduled Castes, who had converted to Islam. Another campaign was to protest against Congress Government policies that it perceived as pro-Muslim, including the special status of Kashmir. Furthermore, throughout the 1980s the VHP had recruited Hindu religious leaders in an attempt to agree upon a set of principles that united all Hindus.

Hinduism – if it is an ‘ism’ at all – is a belief system of infinite diversity that defies the prospect of a unifying set of principles. It is not that no one had tried before. British scholars for centuries studied Sanskrit texts to make sense of the beliefs of so many of the empire’s subjects. But as Wendy Doniger so intricately describes in The Hindus: An Alternative History, oral traditions, village rituals, local deities, and spiritual practices have continued to evolve despite British and Indian religious reform movements that have tried to tame them (Doniger, 2008). In this context, the VHP had a tall task ahead of it, so it utilized some of the most common and widely told narratives of the Hindu past, particularly the great epic Ramayana.

The Ramayana is ‘told’ annually through a series of popular festivals in the autumn. It is often performed in local theatre and takes on regional characteristics that adapt the story to local custom. In 1988 it was serialized for Indian television. Every week, families all over the country tuned into the programme on Sunday morning. Arvind Rajagopal, writing about politics and television, argues that this televised version of the Ramayana, like a similar one later on the Mahabharata, helped generate a common culture among Hindus, who otherwise differ even in their interpretations and telling of these epics (Rajagopal, 2001: 151). In addition, these televised versions departed from older films of the same stories, in that the actors played the divine characters more realistically and in more realistic looking settings. The story in any version is compelling. Ram, the hero, is the rightful heir to the throne of the Kingdom of Ayodhya, but is exiled for fourteen years due to palace intrigue. This is not the place for a complete retelling of the story, but what is important is that the town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh is the place that many people believe to be the Ayodhya of the Ramayana, and therefore, birthplace of Lord Ram.

In fact, the VHP believed that the actual soil of Ram’s birthplace, i.e., Ramjanmabhoomi in Hindi, lay beneath the site of a sixteenth century mosque, and in one scene in the televised version Ram reveals that he has been carrying soil from his birthplace in Ayodhya in his waistband. In exile, Ram sets up the soil as a shrine. The scene, therefore, underscores a sacred connection between Ram and Ayodhya and reinforces the ongoing Ram Janamabhoomi movement happening at the time (Rajagopal, 2001: 109). The mosque in Ayodhya, known as the Babri Masjid, had a narrative history of its own. It is said to have been built in 1528 in honour of the Mughal Emperor Babur. Babur was the first in the line of the dynasty that ruled India from 1526 until the British. He was known as valiant in war, elegant in writing, and merciful as a ruler; at least that is how he portrays himself in the Baburnama, his own memoirs, and how he is described by his sister, Gulbadan Begum, in the Humayun Nama, the story of his son’s reign. During Babur’s rule a number of mosques were built in his name, for example, to thank God for the birth of a child or success in a campaign; and tradition holds that this applied to the one in Ayodhya.
The VHP called for the destruction of the Babri mosque and for a temple to Ram to be built on the site. That claim had come before and there were clashes over the site recorded in the nineteenth century as well. In fact, the British Government of India had sealed the mosque due to this conflict. Briefly in 1949, the mosque was opened and an image of Lord Ram placed inside, though the building was then resealed. In 1986 in response to a lawsuit by Hindus who want to worship at the site, a local judge ruled that the masjid should be unsealed for the purpose of local worship.

The VHP used the temple/mosque controversy to create a common issue for Hindus, calling upon its supporters to contribute financially and to join protests calling for the building of a temple. As an example of the successful use of media, on the day that the judge’s order was announced, VHP supporters chanted the mosque in full view of state television, an image that reinforced their power and message.

Although the BJP attempted to broaden its constituency in 1980 by de-emphasizing its Hindu politics in order to draw into its fold politicians who were more generally frustrated with Congress rule, the pro-Hindu faction of the party, and especially, former Jan Sangh members associated with the cadres from the RSS, remained the most powerful. In fact, the BJP relied on the support of related grassroots organizations and those sympathetic to the VHP to mobilize Hindu activists for its election campaigns.

Therefore, there were obvious contradictions in the new appeal by the BJP for a broad base. From its first convocation in Bombay, traditional leaders such as Vijaya Raje Scindia, the powerful politician and former royal from Madhya Pradesh, questioned the language of the new BJP manifesto. She claimed the new party had departed from the pro-Hindu, traditional family values of the Jan Sangh (Jaipur Day, 1996: 319). If such a departure existed it was not reflected in most of the activists and many of the candidates in 1980 and 1983 who came from among the cadres trained in RSS camps.

In 1990, when V. P. Singh began promoting the Mandal issue, L. K. Advani, a stalwart of the BJP and its chief ideologue, announced that he would begin a Ram Yatra (a procession) across India from Somnath, a well-known temple city in Gujarat, west to Ayodhya in order to raise funds to build the Ram Janambhoomi Mandir, a temple to Ram. Advani admitted that Mandal influenced his decision. As an MP from Delhi (where several of the student suicides had taken place in protest against Mandal), he was under pressure from upper caste constituents to take a stand against V. P. Singh. However, backward classes made up more than 52 per cent of the voters and so he did not want to address the issue too openly. Instead he changed the subject; the temple issue shifted the focus of attention.

The Yatra proceeded and did indeed mobilize considerable support, but provoked violence and conflict as well. When it crossed the state of Bihar, Laloo Prasad Yadav, then the Janata Dal Chief Minister of Bihar, ordered Advani arrested. Advani’s arrest sparked a new round of violence, escalating the issue. By 1992, the VHP once again proceeded to Ayodhya. This time on 6 December 1992 a massive rally of 70,000 stormed the mosque and succeeded in destroying the Babri Masjid, finally and completely [Doc. 39, p. 168]. While the controversy over the site continued, the destruction of the 400-year-old mosque emboldened Hindu nationalists. Concomitant violence, in which the Muslim minority community comprised most of the victims, demonstrated how far beyond the symbolic the Mandir issue had gone.

CONCLUSION: MANDAL/MANDIR AND CHANGES IN GOVERNING

Both the reservations issue and the Ram temple issue sparked conflict and violence, so powerful were the ideologies they invoked or challenged. Scholars and social activists (often together) especially in the mid to late 1990s focused on the larger social costs of the resulting violence. Discussions turned to the ‘communalization of politics,’ which means the ways in which political parties appealed to Hindu/Muslim conflict in order to capture votes. They also use this issue to point to ‘challenges to Indian secularism’. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, public intellectuals always played a role in political activism in India. The new urgency generated by communal tensions created ongoing connections between organizations that addressed the needs of victims of violence and scholars writing about that violence.

By the end of the century, the trajectory of the two narratives diverged. In some ways 1992 was a turning point. In that year Parliament passed the Panchayati Raj Act, which established a system of local self-governing bodies across India, which were charged, in part, with economic development. The next chapter discusses this in detail. Key to the OBC issue, though, is that Panchayats included reservations for Other Backward Classes, in every council, in every village, and every district. The next stage in the movement for Other Backward Classes, therefore, was reservations in private universities and perhaps in Parliament.

By the end of the century, the Ram temple had not been built, but the mandir issue continued to incite violence. Even when the BJP won parliamentary elections in 1998, the government did not sanction building the temple in Ayodhya. However, while in office, the party sought to influence the terms of historical debate by commissioning sympathetic histories and archaeological research to underpin the case for building a temple. The issue remained foregrounded in the twenty-first century as well, when tragic riots...
took place in Gujarat. But that complicated story is beyond the range of this book.

The politics of both Mandal and Mandir were profoundly shaped by events and personalities from the Janata Party Government of 1977–79. Yet these were only two of the significant legacies of the moment. More broadly, the Janata Government permanently challenged the political domination of the Congress Party. In a sense then, the Emergency, the pinnacle of Congress excesses, begins its transformation from the central political actor in Indian politics to one of several contenders to political power.

In 1980 and again in four of the next six parliaments, the Indian National Congress served as the ruling party. Its influence surely was not destroyed by the Emergency. However, as the political scientist Myron Weiner argued at the time, the Congress Party that won the election of 1980 was not the same party that had governed India previously, meaning that the organization had been weakened (Weiner, 1983). In fact, internally, the Congress suffered from a lack of party elections, reliance on personalities rather than service and expertise, and political interference by the Central Government in the affairs of states. Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination in 1991 both facilitated Congress victories but challenged the resilience of the party.

The history of the interplay between political parties from 1980 until 2000, shows the development of alliances and a multi-party democracy that the Janata Party of 1977 proved could develop.

Social history at the crossroads of local, national, and global movements

The history of the 1990s demonstrated contradictory impulses in India to concentrate on local issues on the one hand, and globalization on the other – or even both at the same time. The government passed the Panchayati Raj Act, a law that profoundly changed how local development took place and devolved control to villages. At the same time it liberalized economic policies relating to the flow of capital that enhanced Indian companies’ position in global markets. This chapter is about these contradictions and the moments in which the local, the global, and the national intersect. For example environmental movements, which began with local protests, won some villagers control over their land in Indian courts, and brought protests over dam projects to international attention. Also, Hindu nationalist politics, which benefiting from financial connections abroad, advocated swadeshi – India-first – at home and renamed Bombay ‘Mumbai’. This chapter, therefore, looks at the wider influence of local action and the local implications of global action.

Another common thread in this period is that women’s politics took centre stage. Longstanding issues about women’s political representation, marriage laws, divorce, and women’s inheritance gained considerable traction. Furthermore, key political players in this period were powerful women in political parties – from Uma Bharti to Mayawati – and the leaders of social movements and non-governmental organizations were often women as well – for example, Medha Patkar or Ella Bhatt.

It is not surprising then that scholars looking at this period have often employed gender analysis to understand the different experiences of women and men in these political arenas. The politics of the Babri mosque/Ram temple issue, as described in the previous chapter, could not be dissociated from the overwhelmingly male nature of the movement at its core. Young men from the RSS and VHP dominated the group that tore down the Babri mosque and populated demonstrations. Yet, equally important to the movements was the appeal the mandir (temple) issue elicited among women followers who provided their financial and other support.