Frenzied Crowds, Radical Politics and Consolidation of Democracy: The Indian Puzzle

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India emerged as a democratic state from close to two centuries of British colonial rule in 1947. As a changing society with mass poverty, a highly developed political system and a professional civil service, India turned into a noisy but stable democracy. Like other changing societies of the 'third world', India too has had its frenzied crowds and political movements of multifarious complexions. Radical movements have emerged as a useful complement to politics based on party competition. Language movements which had rocked Indian democracy in the 1950s, led to the creation of the three-language formula which successfully accommodated the demands within the new States based on mother-tongue, with special protection for linguistic minorities. The same holds for caste-based movements in the 1960s. The biggest challenge in the form of religious conflict led to the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992. However, radical movements that led to these conflicts eventually found accommodation within the democratic political system through a combination of the ballot box and judicialisation. Unlike many of its peers, India's political system is able to take radical politics in its stride, and even gain momentum from the radical challenge to the state.[2] That leads to a comparative question: why does India succeed where others fail?

My objective in this essay is to explain this Indian exception through an analysis of the sources of radical politics, the methods of India's coping, and their general implication for the consolidation of democracy. I shall

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2 Pakistan split into two as a result of the inability of the state to cope with the language movement (Bhasa andolan) that started in the 1950s. Radical demands from Buddhist monks and Tamil nationalists have led Sri Lanka to civil war, and now, a sullen peace.

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first analyse the origin and evolution of radical politics, based on class, caste, ethnicity, region and religion. An analysis of the political system that serves as interface of the modern state and traditional society will come in next. This will be set in the context of a dynamic, neo-institutional model of governance which helps the political system to transform rebels into stakeholders and hone the sharp edges of radical politics into the malleable body of conventional politics. I shall conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the Indian model and the scope for further theorisation through cross-national comparison.

The Origin of Radical Politics: Competing Paradigms

Radical politics differs from conventional politics in its scope, strategy and objectives. One normally associates conventional politics with political parties, office-seeking leaders on the campaign-trail and lobbying by interest groups. They focus on the allocation of resources, winning office and engage in the business of 'who gets what, when and how' (Lasswell 1936). Radical politicians extend the domain of politics beyond the ken of conventional politics and extend the scope of politics into abstract goals such as the structure of social power and the core values that underpin the political system.[3] Conventional, office-seeking politicians promote their goals through elections, lobbying, interest and pressure groups. Radical politics urges its participants to go beyond normal political methods and engage in protest action. Speaking generally, one can argue that conventional politics focuses on politics 'within the system' and radical politics concerns itself with 'politics of the system'. However, one cannot quite put radical and conventional politics into two exclusive categories. In practice, there may be an overlap between them, which, as we shall see later in the essay, can become a very useful means for the state in its coping strategy.[4] Whereas stable democracies usually succeed in co-opting the radical challenge into the conventional political arena[5], transitional societies very often fail to ac-

3 David Easton in his concept of political systems expands the domain of politics and defines it as the authoritative allocation of values.

4 See figure 3 'Radical politics, coping strategies and democratic consolidation: Multiple routes to a common goal" below.

5 Recent political developments in the West such as the radical upsurge in the UK around the issue of dissociation of the membership of the country with the European Union (commonly referred to as BREXIT) have shown the limitations to the integrative ability of 'stable' liberal democracies.

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commodate the challengers.[6] Radical, extremist politics can bring the entire edifice of the political system crashing down, leading to the breakdown of order, ending in anarchy, coups d'état, or authoritarian rule.

The factors that lead to the origin of radical politics belong to two different paradigms. The first, the Gurr-Huntington model focuses on relative deprivation – broadly speaking, the gap between expectations and achievements that individuals experience as society changes – which might lead them to defy political order.[7] The second model of radical politics is based on collective actors, asserting abstract values, such as collective identity, defence of what they consider as sacred, or for a collective homeland.[8]

Stable democracies experience radical politics at the fringes of the political system, such as the radical Left and Right, and among disaffected sections of the population, not represented by mainstream parties. However, the conservative dynamism of the system in stable democracies and the capitalist market process usually succeed in absorbing radical challenges into the establishment.[9] Transitional societies, particularly those following the democratic path, prove to be vulnerable to radical politics. The rapid demise of democracy in Afro-Asian, post-colonial democracies, beset by radical movements, is a case in point.

Radical politics in transitional societies emerges from two different groups of people who experience a sense of relative deprivation. Those who held privileged positions in a traditional society might experience a sense of loss when the previously underprivileged sections become assertive, demand higher wages, and the mode of production changes, causing them to lose out in terms of their life style and standard of living. The

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6 Huntington (1968:55) formulates this in terms of the gap between popular expectations that rise as social mobility gains momentum which easily overtakes the limited state capacity in transitional societies.

7 Gurr defines relative deprivation "as a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them" Gurr (1970:13).

8 See Anderson (1983, 1991). For the strategic use of cultural identity as the basis of a homeland, see Mitra (1995:57-78). The core concept of using homeland as strategy, see Banton (1977), and Green (1982:236-46). On suicide terrorism as rational strategy, see Waha (2018).

9 The race riots of the 1960s in the United States led to the Great Society initiative of President Johnson and other programmes of positive discrimination, leading eventually to the rise of the Black middle class and greater representation of black leaders in American politics.

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sense of anger and confusion they feel contributes to radicalism of the religious Right.[10] The formerly underprivileged, on the other hand, with their new expectations might feel frustrated if their mobility aspirations exceed available opportunities.[11] The desire for a homeland, corresponding to one's primordial identity is a good exemplar of the second paradigm of radicalism at work. In post-colonial states, the demand for territories corresponding to mother tongue has often led to the rise of radical movements. The combination of radical sentiments, emerging from either of the two paradigms, or both, if politically mobilised, can lead to the breakdown of orderly rule, state failure or rise of authoritarian systems.

In the South Asian region, Pakistan broke up on the issue of the rise of Bengali nationalism; Sri Lanka and Nepal have both faced civil wars and Afghanistan is currently facing the steady rise of the Taliban, challenging the regime in power. India, which has also seen vigorous radical politics, is an exception to the trend. The original institutional arrangement and territory of the state have stayed intact over the past seven decades. What explains the resilience of democratic governance and consolidation of democracy in India despite the presence of radical political movements?

India: 'Million Mutinies Now'[12]

Social mobility and fragmentation of kinship based, close-knit communities describe the main thrust of Indian politics in the early decades after Independence. Thanks to the introduction of competitive general elections and universal adult franchise, modernisation, social churning, and democratisation have emerged as parallel processes. Castes, key actors in elections, are endogamous status groups, traditionally based on hereditary occupations. Under the impact of democratic competition for power and social reform legislation that has loosened traditional bonds of social hier-

10 Whereas the concepts of Left and Right are usually associated with class in the European context, in India the Right usually refers to political forces, drawing their strength from religious mobilisation, which are opposed to secularism as state policy.

11 For a typology of deprivation, see Gurr (1970:47-53).

12 In Heinemann (1991), *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, the third of his Indian trilogy, which followed India: An Area of Darkness, and India: A Wounded Civilization, V.S. Naipaul gives a haunting image of the spirit of contestation that has shaken up the culture of dominance and subservience that used to be typical of a caste society.

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archy, castes (called *jati* in Hindi) have mutated into caste associations – political actors – that draw on social networks. The traditional *caste-system* is gone but castes continue to be politically visible and powerful. Jatis used to be linked to one another through ties of reciprocal economic, social, and political obligation, in a social structure known as the Jajmani system. This social bond was deftly conceptualised by Dumont (1970) as *homo hierarchicus* indicating the superiority of those with higher status over their social inferiors Dumont (1970). The oppressive aspects of the caste system have been increasingly contested by those at the bottom of the pyramid, particularly the former untouchables now referred to as Dalits (in Hindi, oppressed) and the lower castes mentioned in the Constitution, respectively, as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

A post-colonial context like India's, redolent with the spirit of *A Million Mutinies Now* indicates the layers of rage and memories of oppression that underpin Indian society. To quote:

> *"…the idea of freedom has gone everywhere in India. Independence was worked for by people more or less at the top; the freedom it brought has worked its way down. People everywhere have ideas now of who they are and what they owe themselves. The process quickened with the economic development that came after independence; what was hidden in 1962, or not easy to see, what perhaps was only in a state of becoming, has become clearer. The liberation of spirit that has come to India could not come as release alone. In India, with its layer below layer of distress and cruelty, it had to come as disturbance. It had to come as rage and revolt. India was now a country of a million little mutinies"* (Naipaul 1991:517).

The question that emerges from these observations is why does the radicalism of the masses not add up to large scale political disorder in India? The answer to this question lies in the fact that India's enraged masses are driven by political ambitions that can act as an incentive to take the struggle away from the streets and take it to the parliament, the civil servants and failing all else, to the media and civil society.

India's 'Transactional' Radicalism

Caste groupings in Indian politics are best seen as rational entrepreneurs who are keen on using their relative strength for political benefit. Castes used to derive their tenacity from the uniformity of occupation. So long as members of a caste plied the same occupation, they were inescapably con-

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scious of their belonging to the same caste. The remarkable achievement of social reform policies has been to rupture the link of caste and occupation. Thanks to the undermining of the material basis of the caste system, people born into a particular caste can look forward to mobility beyond their traditional occupation and the status that went with it. "Dissociated from its material roots, the consciousness of caste become purely formal, and a badge of politically convenient self-classification, to be manipulated and waved when necessary. A Chamar [cobbler caste] does not automatically, and instinctively, *think* of himself as a Chamar: rather he now presents himself as one to secure certain advantages. His being is detached from his consciousness, and that is a remarkable gain" (Parekh and Mitra 1990:106-107). [13]

A whole slew of social and economic reform legislation, quotas for socially marginal sections of the population that go by the name of 'reservation' and the generic message of democracy – enfranchisement, entitlement and empowerment – have combined to challenge the very basis of the caste system. The spread of political consciousness, electoral mobility, legislation and administrative action, and social mobility brought about by economic change have combined to challenge the legitimacy of social dominance based on caste status alone and severed the link of caste and occupation. This has led to considerable social strife and social fragmentation.

The 'Responsive' State and 'Banalisation' of Radical Politics

In India, the methods of radical politics spans between system-tolerated forms of protest action such as *gherao*, (Hindi for surrounding a decision-maker) *dharna*, (Hindi for peaceful demonstration, literally, by lying prostrate in front of the decision-maker) boycott, all the way to collective violence and suicide terrorism. Protest movements, including those with a certain degree of violence are quite common in India. They emerge as an act of complaint against a specific grievance, gather momentum if they have a cause that is widely shared and an effective leadership with good communication abilities is available to mobilise these elements into a mass

13 The ubiquitous presence of castes and their radical rhetoric are strategic manoeuvres to gain political and material advantages. Parekh and Mitra add: "Caste consciousness is a ladder he uses to climb out of a social cul-de-sac, and having got to the top he kicks it away. The dialectic of reservation is far more subtle than is generally appreciated" (Parekh and Mitra 1990:106-107).

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movement. Often, the violence that results when protestors disobey orders meant to prohibit their actions soon adds 'police outrage' as an additional support to their cause. The life cycle of the movement comes to an end once a settlement is made. As a matter of fact, as one has seen time and again, and most recently in the case of the Anna Hazare Movement against public corruption, protest movements become an additional entry point for new issues, leaders and political vocabulary in India's noisy but effective democracy. This movement transformed itself into a political party called Aam Admi Party (AAP, in Hindi, "a party of ordinary people") whose leader Kejriwal eventually went on to become the Chief Minister of Delhi. 'Rational' protest thus complemented institutional participation, spreading the message of democracy, empowering those who have been outside the tent, and contributing to the resilience of democracy in a non-Western setting.

A plethora of political parties, elections, pressure groups, judicial interventions and public commissions, security forces, civil service at federal, regional and local levels jostle for space and influence in the public sphere, generate and implement public policies. Alongside normal political process, there is still space for radical politics as a complementary process. The existence of multiple modes of interest articulation and aggregation, combining conventional methods of campaign participation, voting, lobbying and contacting leaders and administrators with indigenous forms of protest has become an effective basis for governance, transition to democracy and its consolidation in India. The fortuitous legacy of Gandhian Satyagraha which had blended participation in elections with limited suffrage and rational protest in a seemingly seamless flow under colonial rule, has developed many variants in India after Independence. These have taken very different forms in regions with well-settled administrative structures as West Bengal, Bihar and Maharashtra. The response of the Indian state to radical politics differs greatly from that in more troubled regions such as Kashmir, the North-East, and the 'red corridor' of India, linking the hill districts of central and eastern India with pockets of Naxalite strength, in the South.[14]

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14 The strategy of engagement with radical movements that the Indian state has followed has been region-specific. In general, areas at the frontiers with geo-political implications (e.g. India's North-East and Jammu and Kashmir) have had more of the stick than the carrot, by the way of the application of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gives armed forces some special powers to engage with political forces fighting against the state.

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India's hyper-active media, NGOs, pro-active judiciary and national political parties give articulation to these regional and local phenomena. Thanks to the multiple modes of participation, state-society relations in India benefit from systematic intermediation of both modern and traditional institutions, creating an ethos of effective and continuous interaction, which helps rebels become stakeholders, or at least aspire to join the ranks of the ruling elite in a conceivable future. The combined effect of all these methods is to dull the sharp edges of class and ethnic conflict and to transform what could have become a state of polarised conflict into a series of protracted negotiations. As such, even while an effective electoral route to power exists, nevertheless the undemocratic route seems to have a parallel life of its own. This adds a touch of ambivalence to democratic consolidation in India.

The overlap of conventional and radical politics can give an ambiguous profile to the concept of radical politics and its location within the social and political space. This contributes to the uncertainty that marks the interpretation of radical activism to democratic transition and consolidation.

How these different types evolve and with what consequence for democratisation depends on a number of factors. Most important of these are the salience that the leading radical activists attach to their shared goal, the number and territorial catchment of the 'imagined' community they draw on, and the response of the state.[15] One can trace the evolution of sub-national movements (figure 1, below), as an exemplar of the evolution of radical politics, its transformation into a movement and eventually, the entry of the movement to State politics.

15 Some 'imagined' communities seek to revive a pre-modern political and cultural space for which historical evidence is available whereas others create a community on the basis of deeply shared sentiments. The former is the case of the movements to create a separate State of Telangana. A similar movement to create a 'Kosala' State in Odisha has been less successful in the absence of comparable historical evidence. See Mitra (2014:372-398).

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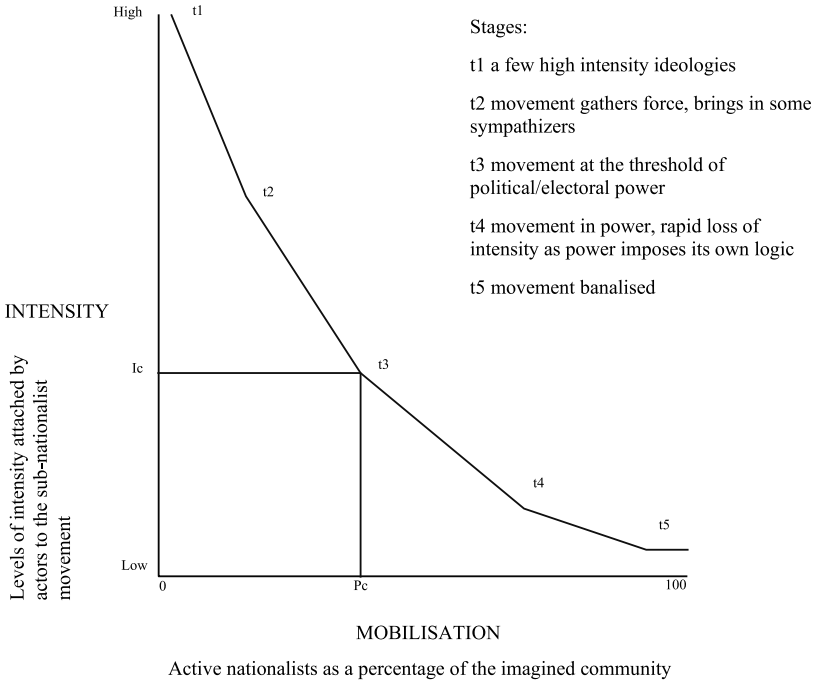
Figure 1: Sub-National Movements



Ic critical threshold of intensity, beyond which nationalism becomes 'visible' over and above 'mundane' politics

Pc critical threshold of numbers beyond which those adhering to nationalism constitute a political force

Source: Mitra (1999:207).

Figure 1 represents the life cycle of a movement that starts with a radical demand for a homeland for a distinctive people. Such movements, led by a handful of activists, begin with spectacular acts of symbolic politics such as suicide for the cause. Their numbers are few in the beginning (time t1 in the figure where one can see the relatively small number in the horizontal axis, but very high intensity in the vertical axis). The Indian state typically reacts with a mixed strategy of accommodation and repression. Typically, such movements go through a transformation as they gain in strength. The average intensity of the movement comes down as numbers grow, and the leadership seeks to exercise its authority over the followers. As the transformation of Assam into eight different States, or creation of new entities

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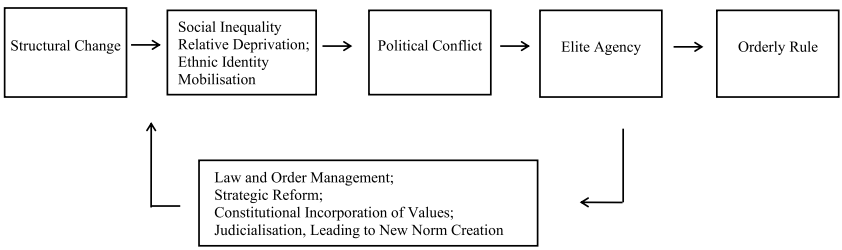
such as Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Telangana shows, such movements eventually lead to the creation of new federal States where the leaders of the separatist movement become the new rulers. Many of these movements have pre-Independence origins, going back to the 1920s when the Indian National Congress recognised the salience of regional identities and organised its provincial committees based on linguistically contiguous areas. As their numbers grow, average intensity (i.e., the readiness of participants to trade off conventional rewards of politics in favour of radical demands) lessens. Eventually, the movement enters electoral competition by organising itself as a party, and, if successful in winning a majority, becomes a ruling party in the new State, corresponding to its homeland. Out of the engagement with such movements, the Indian state has developed the concept of as a 'cooperative' federalism – a form of power-sharing – in which national, State and local governments interact cooperatively and collectively to solve common problems rather than acting in an adversarial mode.

India's Dynamic, Neo-Institutional Model of Governance

A dynamic, neo-institutional model of governance (figure 2, below) which underpins India's political system, helps the state accommodate radical movements into the fabric of the country's resilient democracy (Mitra 2008:1-23). By drawing on the logic of human ingenuity, driven by self-interest, the innovation of appropriate rules and procedures, and most of all – agency of elites and their followers – one can explain how policies, institutions and processes that respond to popular demands can enhance governance.

Figure 2: A Dynamic Neo-Institutional Model of Governance



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The model of governance depicted in figure 2 builds on the basic idea of relative deprivation, germane to the Gurr-Huntington model. Thus, political change induced by decolonisation can lead to radical movements based on a sense of resentment against social inequality of the caste system, relative deprivation based on caste conflict, or demands for a homeland, leading to ethnic identity mobilisation. These radical demands lead to conflict Huntington (1968:55). However, the presence of an elite decision-making body which is sensitive to such demands and makes appropriate policies based on law and order management, strategic social and economic reform, constitutional incorporation of values that the radical movements consider non-negotiable and provides a judicial window for adjudication of radical demands.

The model derives its strength from the logic of rational choice and game theory. Radical demands emerge as zero-sum games where the state and radical movements face each other as adversaries. However, a midpoint, jointly devised by politicians aware of both sides of the argument, and civil servants adept at transforming such compromises into appropriate policy can bring satisfaction to both sides. In a social context, where individuals face each other daily and can expect to do so over the foreseeable future, their proximity to one another and knowledge of each other might induce them to what Axelrod (1984) calls 'tit for tat', which is to say, people learn to reciprocate like with like.[16]

If the political system violates deeply held values and beliefs which people consider sacred and non-negotiable then rule-infraction can become a good in itself. Tamil identity in the southern State of Madras was strong enough to 'kill or die for' in the 1950s, but once Tamil identity was constitutionally guaranteed as the basic structure of politics in the region renamed Tamil Nadu (the home of the Tamil people), governance bounced back. If the core values and symbols of a society are constitutionally protected, then governance is likely to be higher.

Social life is recursive. Since there is a 'tomorrow', the actor sees the incentive in investing in goodwill and social capital. Thus, following Axelrod, knowledge, proximity, reciprocity and recursiveness, can lead radical adversaries to cooperate. Political actors who generally resort to self-help can learn to understand and abide by social norms. Compliance, in this case, emerges from a combination of regulation and self-regulation. Trust,

16 The conditions under which cooperation among egoists can evolve is the main focus of Axelrod (1984).

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shared norms and social networks that result from such institutional arrangements enhance governance.

The incorporation of new social elites and creation of new political arenas enhances governance. Power-sharing – turning rebels into stakeholders – makes compliance attractive and reduces the need or temptation of non-compliance. Governance can be improved by converting potential rule breakers into legislators, provided they enjoy political support within the community. Successful and credible electoral democracy turns poachers into gamekeepers. Institutional arrangements based on the logic of federalism and consociational forms of power-sharing promote governance.

Factors such as effective initiation and implementation of reform and law and order management which enhance governance can be specified in terms of the model presented in figure 2. Political institutions, as interfaces of society and state can play a crucial role in this context (March and Olsen 1984:738-49). This concept alerts us to the crucial room to manoeuvre that institutions can provide the new elites with (Mitra 1991). Further dynamism is added to the model by leaving open the criteria of legitimate political action to political actors at the local and regional levels. The response of the decision-making elites to crises through law and order management, strategic reform and redistributive policies, and constitutional change in order to give legitimacy to contested, embedded values, acts as a feedback loop that affects the perception of the crucial variables by people at the local and regional levels.

The dynamic neo-institutional model of governance (figure 2) brings these ideas together. It is based on elite decision-making that combines law and order management, strategic social and economic reform, judicialisation of conflicts and constitutional incorporation of core social values has helped the Indian state cope with radical challenges. India's significant achievement in the area of positive discrimination which has successfully severed the cultural and economic links between caste and occupation (Mitra 1999), and legislation which whittled away social privilege, bear ample testimony to the change that has come about democratically. When elite initiatives result in redistributive policies and constitutional change, they lead to the reduction of perceived inequality and accommodation of normative issues such as that of group identity. Once abstract issues like values and identity are incorporated into the constitution through appropriate changes in the rules of the game and creation of new arenas, politics within the reconstituted units reverts to the everyday politics of conflict over material interests.

This neo-institutional model of governance incorporates at least four parameters. A bureaucratic state machinery combines policy responsiveness

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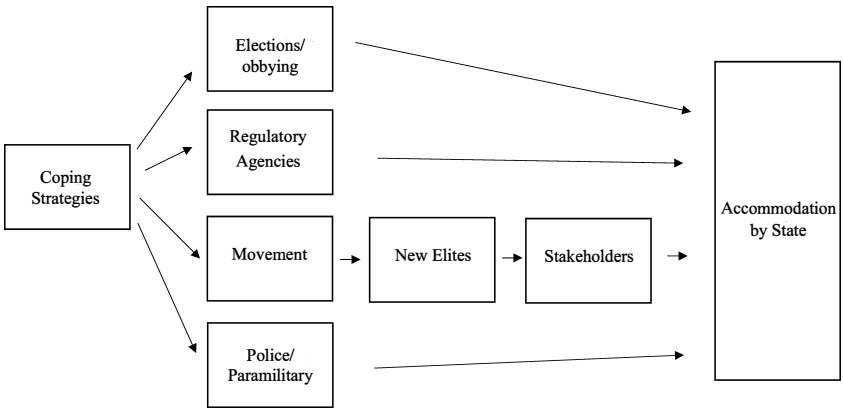
and law and order management. Elections, to all levels of the political system help with contribution to agenda setting by elected political leaders and local protest movements. Elections transform social elites into political elites who use two-track strategies that combine both institutional and non-institutional modes of action (Mitra 1991). Finally, elected governments who wish to retain their popularity and electability make strategic use of social reform and institutional change, which they see as political resources.[17]

Radical Politics and Representation: Multiple Routes to Similar Goal

The discussion of India's mode of governance in the above section will help illuminate the multiple modes of political action available to the state and the radical activist. The paths indicated in figure 3 show the multiple routes that are available to radical activists in India.

Figure 3: Radical Politics, Coping Strategies and Political Accommodation: Multiple Routes to a Common Goal



Source: the author.

17 This model, which approaches the problem of challenges to political stability distinguishes itself from the structural-functional approaches because of its methodological individualism, the incorporation of rules as an endogenous variable and the specification of cultural and historical contexts as exogenous constraints that account for the bounded rationality of the actors.

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The first of these methods is for the state to encourage radical activists to engage the state by entering elections, or negotiating directly with the government. A perusal of everyday politics in India's North-East will show how the government continuously attempts to bring radical secessionists to negotiation, even when some of their demands are considered unconstitutional or unrealistic. The second method is to facilitate judicial adjudication of radical demands. India's Supreme Courts has developed the doctrine of public interest litigation (PIL) through which radical groups, particularly those agitating for the environment, as well as those who contest state action in the area of law and order, can approach the judiciary by filing a writ petition (Schusser 2018). The third method of engagement is to let the radical movement follow its lifecycle (figure 1, above) and engage it once it receives a popular mandate. The Telangana movement is a good example of this mode of action. The fourth method is the use of force to set up an upper limit beyond which radical movements are warned not to go, beyond which they risk of facing up to the full firepower of the state.

We have seen time and again, how, leaders, espousing radical demands, can directly approach administrators and policy makers for implementation of state policies if they found them lacking, call on regulatory agencies like the judiciary and the media to vent their grievances. Thus, radical activists eventually enrich the social base of politics by contributing new leadership to supplement the existing group of elites. Democracy consolidation happens when orderly, democratic rule takes place, with the induction of new elites from below. Thanks to this policy of turning 'rebels into stakeholders', India has been able to adapt an important model of governance into a political system appropriate to local needs and custom.

The Moderation of Radical Political Parties: The Central Tendency in Indian Politics

India's electoral system, based on single member constituencies, simple majority voting systems, and free and fair polls have encouraged the full spectrum of political forces present in the country to take to the electoral route to power.[18] In contrast with proportional representation, the form of representation chosen by India encourages the formation of broad-based

18 However, to be able to compete in elections one needs to take an oath of loyalty to the constitution. This excludes political forces like the Naxalites and terrorists who explicitly espouse violence as their mode of action.

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coalitions, on a short term basis. This blunts the edge of exclusive ideologies. Such was their confidence in electoral democracy that the Government of India led by Jawaharlal Nehru permitted both Communists and the Hindu nationalist Jan Sangh to take part in the first general elections of 1951-52. Neither did particularly well in terms of seats gained, but their inclusion in the electoral process was an effective method of moderating extremist ideologies.[19]

The violent peasant uprising in Telangana in 1946-48 which was put down by the Indian army led to an internal struggle between a radical and a moderate factions of the Communist Party of India. However, participation in the general election of 1951-52 and the 20th party congress of the CPSU which endorsed the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism made it possible for the CPI to moderate its stand on violent revolution as its official ideology. The CPI faced a major crisis in 1962 when the Sino-Indian conflict broke out. The faction of the party that took the side of the Chinese split from the CPI and came to the known as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was a radical communist party. However, its growing strength saw it into elected power in Tripura, West Bengal and Kerala where the party formed government, under the Indian constitution! From the point of view of radical Marxism in India, this was a pyric victory because it caused the next split in India's communist movement between pro-system and anti-system factions, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), also referred to as Naxalites was born. Split into several factions – warring against the state police as well as one another – this tendency continues to embrace the strategy of violent revolution as the 'correct' form of radical politics. However, its impact is steadily on the wane.

The view from the Right is almost symmetrical. The Jan Sangh, which represented the voice of the Hindu Right, started its post-Independence career with the opprobrium of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic. However, the party learnt to coalesce with other opposition parties in the 1960s when the Congress dominance declined and multiparty coalitions became the rule. It is this strategy which got the party to enter the Union government in 1977 as part of the Janata coalition. When this fell apart, most of the members of the Jan Sangh came out and formed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which followed a relatively moderate line. Its

19 We learn from Downs (1957) that party competition under single majority rules will lead to a convergence to the median. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph (1987) have formulated it as the 'moderation thesis' and shown how extremist parties in India have gradually converged to the middle of the ideological spectrum.

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championship of the cause of building a temple on the spot where the Babri Mosque stood enhanced its popularity. In the course of its rapid rise to power, the party had drawn on the desire of many Hindus to see a more prominent role for Hindu culture within the institutions of the secular state and to deny special treatments to minorities, such as a special status for the Muslim majority State of Jammu and Kashmir. When the mosque was demolished by a mob of Hindu zealots, the State government of Uttar Pradesh, led by the BJP, accepted responsibility for its failure to uphold law and order and resigned. Subsequently, the imperatives of India's coalitional politics have caused the party to moderate its stand on cultural and confessional issues. During the short-lived tenure of Vajpayee as Prime Minister (1998-1999), the party spoke more of good governance and less of Hindu nationalism. Back in office in 1999 and with a clear majority for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), of which the BJP was the largest partner in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Vajpayee announced government to follow the same moderate policies that he had launched during his previous tenure. However, ambivalence persisted as the NDA manifesto did take the temple issue on board, albeit in a muted fashion. It said, "We continue to hold that the judiciary's verdict in this matter should be accepted by all. At the same time, efforts should be intensified for dialogue and a negotiated settlement in an atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill" (National Democratic Alliance 2004). Despite continued acts of radical behaviour by fringe Right wing groups, under Prime Minister Modi, *sabka sath*, *sabka vikas*, (together with all, development for all) has become the official doctrine of the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, 'the Indian People's Party').

However, just as among left radicals, the dilemma among right radicals persists. The Hindu nationalist movement is constantly caught in the dilemma between political mobilisation vs. electoral representation, integration vs. accommodation, ideology vs. populism, *shakha* (cadre) vs. *janata* (mass, people). Many suspect the BJP of running with the hare and hunting with the hound, for they are inclined to go along with electoral democracy as long as it brings in the power. But when it does not gain power, or control slips, the political leadership tends to wake up the sleeping giant of a mobilised majority Hindu community.

Beyond Alterity: Indian 'Exceptionalism' Explained

Has India found a unique, idiosyncratic route to democracy transition and consolidation or is the Indian solution capable of being understood in gen-

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eral terms? An analysis of radical politics helps appreciate the kaleidoscopic character of Indian politics. Protest movements including those with a certain degree of violence are quite common in India. They emerge as an act of complaint against a specific grievance, gather momentum if they have a cause that is widely shared and an effective leadership with good communication abilities is available to mobilise these elements into a mass movement. The life cycle of the movement comes to an end when a settlement is made.[20] 'Rational' protest thus complements institutional participation, spreading the message of democracy, empowering those who have been outside the tent, and contributing to the resilience of democracy in a non-Western setting. The conflation of radical and conventional politics has thus contributed to the deepening and broadening of Indian democracy. The Indian case reinforces the general lesson that anti-system politics, under certain conditions, can actually help in consolidating democracy.

The conflation of radical and conventional politics within the structure of the neo-institutional model of governance has been an important step in democracy transition and consolidation of India. The Indian political system has built this on the residual legacy of Gandhian *Satyagraha*. As a young barrister, Gandhi had discovered the potential of combining institutional participation and rational protest for the assertion of democratic rights in South Africa and transformed this 'experiment', with his insuperable political skill, into the concept of *Satyagraha*. On his return to India, he supplemented this with two further concepts – *swadeshi* and *Swaraj* – which became the firm basis of an enduring link between India's civil society and the abstract goal of independence from British colonial rule.[21] Other images add to the confusing signals that India sends out to democrats across the world. Entrenched insurgencies, hectoring candidates in the

20 As a matter of fact, as one has seen time and again, and most recently in the case of the Anna Hazare Movement against public corruption, protest movements become an additional entry point for new issues, leaders and political vocabulary in India's noisy but effective democracy.

21 Gandhi, the quintessential lawyer and activist, was particularly keen to define the norms of the core concepts that underpinned his brand of civil society activism. Thus, Satyagraha had to be more than a mere struggle for power and had to have a moral basis that transcended the interest of the adversaries and placed the agenda at a higher level of synthesis. Swaraj referred to self-rule – a shade higher in terms of the moral basis of power than mere independence. Swadeshi – literally, the consumption of goods produced in India – connected Indian producers to the Indian consumers, thus, adding to the political agenda the salience of economic independence from foreign rule. The triad of concepts became part of the core ideas of Indian democracy.

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campaign mode and serpentine lines of men and women patiently waiting to exercise their franchise exist side by side, each of them pressing its claim in the name of democratic rights.

Conclusion

Images of rampaging crowds, pitched battles between demonstrators and the forces of law and order, wanton destruction of public and private property, from Hong Kong, Paris and Kolkata, and large swathes of South America and Africa denote waves of protest sweeping over the globalising world. A perusal of the Indian media, on any single day, comes up with a rich harvest of protest, some of which has turned violent.[22] Few countries today are immune to this surge of radical politics. However, while political order in some countries breaks down in the face of radical movements, India appears to be able to cope more successfully. The detailed analysis of residual radicalism of Maoist groups in Eastern India, Islamic radicalism in Kashmir and some ethnic separatist movements in India's North-East is not possible within the limited space of this article. With these exceptions, Indian experience of coping with radical politics has been generally successful in coping with challenges from the Left and the Right. The significance of the Indian case lies in the fact that radical politics, rather than weakening the foundations of the state and the roots of democratic institutions, actually reinforces it. This article has analysed this puzzling case of the Indian exception, and drawn some implications for the accommodation of radical politics within the structure of representative democracy.

Radicalism in India is 'transactional' in the sense that radical movements articulate extreme political demands. However, once they have articulated them and added them to the political agenda, they engage in the conventional politics of negotiation, leading, ultimately to some form of accommodation. Election-fuelled political competition has blunted the sharp edges of radical ideology and led to democratic social policies. These have helped accommodate political cleavages based on region, religion, class, caste, and tribe within the democratic political system. In fact, it is this interaction which has conflated the norms of Western liberal democ-

22 See The Hindu (14 December 2019) for a detailed account of radical protest against the recent amendments to the Citizenship Law of India. The importance of foreign reactions to these radical movements can be seen in the advisories issued by France, Israel, the US and the UK for their nationals travelling to India.

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racy and the Indian context. All of these developments have enhanced the legitimacy of democratic politics in India. Legislations, like the Right to Information (RTI), which have helped civil society activism and bring radical politicians into the fold of conventional politics. The availability of a radical route has cut the ground from under the feet of revolutionary politics and underground organisations which have stymied democratic politics in many transitional societies.

The Indian exception has come about through visionary leadership, the historical legacy of limited elections under the British raj, the no-holds-barred electoral competition for power in India after Independence, and the two-track strategy of the state, combining accommodation and repression. Coalition politics has bolstered the 'fungibility' of ideology and power in India. That, in turn, has enhanced the transactional character of radical politics. Indian democracy, by engaging with deep-seated grievances of ordinary people and listening to their radical demands, has been able to guide its political aspirants to the polling booth. The electoral process has become the only realistic path to office and power in India.[23] This, probably, is the most important take-away from the Indian case in a cross-national comparison of radical politics and its resolution.

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23 One hears the magisterial voice of Charles Tilly who had castigated the reflex reaction of states in describing radical politics as irrational. Tilly had questioned simplistic theories of social conflict that casts civil society activists as apolitical. "The image", Tilly had remarked, commenting on such theories, "is hydraulic: hardship increases, pressure builds up, the vessel bursts. The angry individual acts as a reservoir of resentment, a conduit of tension, a boiler of fury. But not as a thinking, political man operating on principle" Tilly (1975:390).

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