Introduction to Indian Politics

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Chapter 1
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In his celebrated speech, delivered to India's Constituent Assembly on the eve of the 15th August 1947, to herald India's independence from British rule, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, famously asked if the newly independent nation was "brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future". If one conceives of India, as many Indians would, in terms of a trinity of attributes – democratic in government, secular in outlook, and united by geography and a sense of nationhood – then, in terms of the first of these, it would appear to have succeeded handsomely.

Since, the Parliamentary General Election of 1951, which elected the first cohort of members to its lower house of Parliament (the *Lok Sabha*), India has proceeded to elect, in unbroken sequence, another 15 such cohorts so that the most recent *Lok Sabha* elections of 2014 gave to the country a government drawn from members to the 16th *Lok Sabha*. Given the fractured and fraught experiences with democracy of India's immediate neighbours (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar) and of a substantial number of countries which gained independence from colonial rule, it is indeed remarkable that independent India has known no other form of governmental authority save through elections.

Elections (which represent 'formal democracy'), are a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for 'substantive democracy'. In a 'substantive democracy', citizens not only vote but, having elected their representatives, continue to have a sense of involvement in public affairs engendered by a sense that their views are heeded by those they have chosen to represent them (Huber *et. al*., 1997). By corollary, substantive democracy requires one to listen to opposing points of view and to respond to these in measured tones. The shrillness of public discourse in India, both within Parliament and outside it, may give the impression that substantive democracy, as opposed to its formal counterpart, is still a distant goal for the country. And yet, as Corbridge *et. al.* (2012) note, India has progressed a long way along the road to becoming a genuine democracy: people participate in politics, are more conscious of their rights and are aided in this by a plethora of rights-based bodies and movements (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004).

India's real achievement in promoting substantive democracy has been at the level of the village. The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act of 1993 made it mandatory for all villages to have a village council (*Gram Sabha*) consisting of all registered voters on the electoral roll of that village. The *Gram Sabha* was to be entrusted with the power of supervising the functioning of the elected village *panchayat* and to approve the panchayat's development plan for the village and the associated budget. Consequently, in addition to voting, electors in villages had another form of political participation: they could attend *Gram Sabha* meetings and participate in its discussions. Furthermore, the Act stipulated that one-third of seats on the village *panchayat* should be reserved for women and disadvantaged groups like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.[1]

In delivering India's 'democratic achievement', Nehru's role in establishing the primacy of parliament cannot be exaggerated. Even as stern a critic of Nehru as Anderson (2012) admitted that:

> "Nehru's greatness, it is generally felt, was to rule as a democrat in a non-Western world teeming with dictators. Preceptor to his nation, he set an example from which those who came after him could not long depart. Tutored by him, Indian democracy found its feet, and has lasted ever since. That by conviction Nehru was a liberal democrat is clear. Nor was this a merely theoretical attachment to principles of parliamentary government. As prime minister, he took his duties in the *Lok Sabha* with a conscientious punctilio that put many Western rulers to shame, regularly speaking and debating in the chamber, and never resorted to rigging national elections or suppressing a wide range of opinion. So much is incontestable." (p. 26).

It is, of course, true that Nehru burnished his credentials as a democrat at a period when the party he headed – the Indian National Congress (INC) –dominated India's political landscape. In the *Lok Sabha* elections of 1951, the INC received 45 percent of the vote and won 75 percent of the seats to the 1st *Lok Sabha* (364 seats out of a total of 489). Its closest rivals in that General Election were

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[1] In response to the burden of social stigma and economic backwardness borne by persons belonging to India's 'untouchable castes', the Constitution of India allows for special provisions for their members. These are mainly in the form of reserved seats in the national parliament, state legislatures, municipality boards and village councils (*panchayats*); job reservations in the public sector; and reserved places in public higher educational institutions. Articles 341 and 342 include a list of castes entitled to such benefits and all those groups included in this list – and subsequent modifications to this list – are referred to as, respectively, 'Scheduled Castes'. Similarly, Articles 341 and 342 also include a list of *tribes* entitled to similar benefits and all those groups included in this list – and subsequent modifications to this list – are referred to as the 'Scheduled Tribes'

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Independent candidates and the Socialist Party who took, respectively, 37 and 12 seats on the back of, respectively, 16 and 12 percent of the total vote. The Communist Party of India received only 3.3 percent of the vote but managed to win 16 seats.

The dominance of the INC was unchanged in subsequent General Elections. In the General Election of 1957, the INC received 45 percent of the national vote to take 75 percent of the available *Lok Sabha* seats (371 of the total of 494); in the 1962 General Election, the INC received 48 percent of the vote and won 361, out of an available 494, seats (75 percent) while in the 1967 General Election, which was the first after Nehru's death in 1964, the INC received 41 percent of the vote to win 283 out of a total of 520 seats (54 percent). The dominance of the INC in Indian parliamentary elections survived the 1971 General Election – when, on the back of nearly 44 percent of the national vote, it won 352 seats in a House of 546 – before coming to a juddering halt in 1977.

The *Lok Sabha* elections of 1977 were held after the longest period between two successive elections in India, the last elections being six years earlier in 1971. It offered voters an opportunity to express their views on (Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter) Indira Gandhi's imposition of a state of Emergency in India in 1975. [2] This was triggered by the Allahabad High Court setting aside Mrs. Gandhi's election as the member for Rae Bareilly, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, in the *Lok Sa*bha election of 1971 because it found that, as Prime Minister, she had illegally used the machinery of government for electoral purposes. Instead of stepping aside in favour of a caretaker Prime Minister, pending the outcome of her appeal to the Supreme Court, Mrs. Gandhi imposed an 'Emergency'. It lasted twenty-one months, from June 1975 till March 1977, and during this period "elections were suspended, political and civil organisations were disbanded, and the media was gagged" (Corbridge *et. al.*, 2013).

The electorate's verdict in the *Lok Sabha* elections of 1977 could not have been clearer: the vote share of the INC fell from 44 percent in the 1971 General Election to 35 percent in 1977 with a

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[2] After Lal Bahadur Shastri's untimely death, she was India's third Prime Minister. This count excludes Gulzarilal Nanda who was interim Prime Minister twice: first, from 27 May-9 June 1964, after Nehru's death and Shastri's appointment and then, from 11-24 January 1966, after Shastri's death and Mrs. Gandhi's appointment.

corresponding fall from 352 to 154 in the number of *Lok Sabha* seats held by the party. Mrs. Gandhi lost her Rae Bareilly seat and, at the age of 81, Morarji Desai became India's fourth Prime Minister.[3]

Prior to the Lok Sabha election of 1977 the main opposition to the INC came from Independent candidates, the communists, and a party, espousing economic liberalism (the *Swatantra* party), which had come to prominence in the *Lok Sabha* election of 1962 winning 18 seats with nearly 8 percent of the national vote. After the 1977 *Lok Sabha* election, however, a new form of opposition emerged in the shape of a coalition of parties, of various ideologies, which came together solely for the purpose of winning elections by fielding common candidates. This amalgam was called the *Janata Party* and it formed the post-1977 government with Desai as Prime Minister but with Charan Singh, leader of the *Bharatiya Lok Dal* (BLD) - one of the *Janata Party*'s most powerful constituents - and Home Minister and also Deputy Prime Minister to Desai, waiting in the wings to take over.

If proof was ever needed of the futility of relying for stable government on a coalition of partners, united by nothing except electoral convenience, and led by persons of overweening political ambition, then the Janata party government of 1977 provided it in abundance. Within two years the BLD, by threatening to withdraw its support from the government, made Desai's position untenable; his resignation in July 1979 was quickly followed by Charan Singh taking over as Prime Minister. Singh's support, however, quickly haemorrhaged away and he lasted just three weeks. Fresh elections were scheduled for 1980. The INC, under Mrs. Gandhi, returned in triumph winning that election and (under the leadership of her son Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded her as Prime Minister, after her assassination in October 1984) winning the next election, in December 1984, as well.

The *Lok Sabha* elections of 1989 were significant for three reasons.

1. They marked the emergence of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) as a serious political force when it won 85 *Lok Sabha* seats in that election; it, thereby, redeemed itself after the indignity of winning just two seats in its electoral debut in the previous *Lok Sabha* elections of 1984.

2. The 1989 election and the 1998 *Lok Sabha* elections bookended a period of parliamentary instability during which, in a span of 10 years, India voted in five *Lok Sabha* elections: 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, and 1999.[4]

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[3] See the previous note on Gulzarilal Nanda,

3. In the decade after the 1989 *Lok Sabha* elections, India experienced - what Jaffrelot (2003) termed - a "silent revolution" as lower-status groups increasingly captured political office and used political power to alter the balance of power between the upper and the lower castes. Each of these aspects is discussed, in turn, below.

The Rise of the BJP

The rise of the BJP was significant in two respects: (i) it offered voters, in the form of Hindu nationalism, an alternative to the 'secular' model propagated by Nehru and which was the bedrock of the INC's ideology[5] and (ii) for the first time, there was the prospect of two-party democracy in India. After two short-lived attempts to be a party of government (following the *Lok Sabha* elections of 1996, a BJP-led government lasted 13 days and, following the 1998 *Lok Sabha* elections, a BJP-led government, lasted just over a year), the BJP, as the senior partner in a coalition of other parties, was at last able to offer the country stable government in 1999 when Prime Minister Vajpayee's government saw out the full five years of the 13th *Lok Sabha* and the *Lok Sabha* elections in 2014 ushered in a BJP majority government with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister.

Political Instability during the 1990s

In terms of government, the outcome of the 1989 election was that the INC, even though it was the largest single party, went into Opposition and a minority 'National Front' government, with V.P. Singh as Prime Minister, was formed with support from the Leftist Parties and the BJP. Subsequent infighting within the parties comprising the 'National Front', in conjunction with the BJP withdrawing its support over the Ayodhya temple issue, resulted in the government resigning after losing a vote of confidence in November 1990. The new government was another minority government, with Chandra Shekhar as Prime Minister, this time supported by the INC. However, within the next few months, the INC withdrew its support - on the charge that the government was 'spying' on the INC's leader, Rajiv Gandhi - paving the way for the dissolution of the 9th *Lok Sabha* and the start of the General Election campaign of 1991.

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[4] If both the 9th and the 10th *Lok Sabhas* had lasted their parliamentary terms of five years there would have been two fewer elections: in 1989, 1994, and 1999.
[5] The 42nd Amendment (1976) to the Indian Constitution, passed under Mrs. Gandhi's government, declared India to be a secular country.

After the 1991 elections the INC, with 244 seats, formed the government (with Narsimha Rao as Prime Minister after the INC's dynastic heir, Rajiv Gandhi, was assassinated in May 1991) with the BJP, on 120 seats, as the main opposition. This government lasted its parliamentary term and the 1996 General Election followed five years later.

The INC made a poor fist of it in the 1996 elections: even though it won a larger share of the vote than the BJP (28.8% compared to 20.3%) it ended up winning fewer seats (140 compared to the BJP's 161). With the BJP, as the largest single party, unable to form a government – Atal Bihari Vajpayee lasted just 13 days as Prime Minister - and the INC, as the next largest party, refusing even to try, the outcome was a minority government. This was formed as a coalition of several smaller parties and labelled the 'United Front' with Deve Gowda as Prime Minister.

The United Front excluded both the BJP and the INC but was supported by the latter. In April 1997, the INC withdrew its support to the United Front, which was increasingly beset by internal wrangling between its constituent parties, but agreed to support another United Front coalition (which included Lalu Prasad Yadav's *Rashtriya Janata Dal* and Mulayam Singh Yadav's *Samajwadi Party* as constituents) with Inder Gujral as Prime Minister. Eleven months later, after Gujral had refused to accede to the INC's demand to drop three ministers from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party from his government, the INC withdrew its support and this government also collapsed: the 11th *Lok Sabha* was dissolved and, in February 1998, a fresh set of parliamentary elections were held to elect the 12th *Lok Sabha*.[6]

The 1998 elections continued the low fortunes of the INC: it obtained the same share of the national vote as the BJP (26%) but ended up with fewer seats (141 to the BJP's 182). The outcome of the election was a coalition government, headed by the BJP with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister. By the end of the year this coalition also collapsed as one of its partners – the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) with 18 seats - withdrew its support. This led to the General Election of September 1999 to elect the 13th *Lok Sabha*.[7]

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[6] The DMK was allegedly criticised by the Jain Commission's Inquiry into Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991 though, since the Commission's Report was never made public, the allegation could not be substantiated.
[7] Its demands were that: a former naval chief, who had been sacked, should be reinstated; the Defence Minister George Fernandes should be relieved of his portfolio; and a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe should be

Since the *Lok Sabha* elections of 1999, India has enjoyed stable government with each government completing its five year term. The 1999 Election resulted in a coalition government, labelled the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), with the BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister. The *Lok Sabha* elections of 2004 and 2009 resulted in a INC-led coalition of centre-left parties, labelled the United Progressive Alliance (UPA): respectively, UPA-I and UPA-II. After the *Lok Sabha* elections of 2014, Narendra Modi became Prime Minister as head of a BJP majority government.

The Rise of the Lower Castes

Foremost among these lower caste groups who achieved political prominence in the 1990s were the 'Other Backward Classes' (Jaffrelot, 2003). These were castes that were not 'forward castes' – in the sense of belonging to the Brahmin, Kshatriya, or Vaishya *varnas* – but who were not, unlike the Scheduled Castes, considered 'untouchable'. Originally they were mobilised by the upper caste INC but they now mobilised themselves *against* the INC In the context of Indian politics, the Other Backward Classes is a useful electoral category encapsulating the lower castes *above the pollution line* who try, by voting along caste lines, to carve political space for themselves.[8]

The catalyst for this 'silent revolution' was the Mandal Commission's report of 1980 which recommended that, in addition to the 23 percent of government jobs reserved for the SC and ST, a *further* 27 percent should be reserved for the Other Backward Classes. In 1990, V.P. Singh's government announced plans to implement this recommendation triggering a wave of "anti-Mandal" rioting in India. In 1992, India's Supreme Court, in *Sawhney v The Union of India*, upheld jobs reservation for the Other Backward Classes but ruled that: (i) reservation was not to extend to more

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ordered (*Frontline*, 24 April - 7 May 1999, http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1609/16090160.htm, accessed 26 November 2015)

[8] It is a political cliché in India to view a person's caste as an important determinant of the party he/she will vote for. In her eponymous book, Chandra (2004) asks why ethnic parties succeed. The *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP), is the main Indian political party which espouses the cause of the Scheduled Castes – who comprise 17% of India's population – against that of the upper castes. It employs the same methods of caste mobilisation in every state – all of which have the same electoral system – but meets with different degrees of success in different states. In one, Uttar Pradesh, it has formed governments; in a second group of states it obtains moderate levels of support but not enough to form a government; in a third group of states it draws a blank. Chandra's answer is that the elites among the Scheduled Castes weigh the advantages, in terms of access to the state patronage system, of voting for their "own" party, the BSP, against voting for another party. If the BSP falls short in this calculation then it fails to attract votes from even its own ethnic group, the Scheduled Castes. The conclusion of her analysis is that the caste basis for voting cannot be taken for granted – it depends upon the circumstances.

than 50 percent of the population and (ii) that groups within the Other Backward Classes category who were manifestly not disadvantaged (the "creamy layer") were to be excluded from reservation.

The implementation of the Mandal Report cemented social identity into the basic structure of Indian politics by establishing, for nearly half of India's population, a clear association between social status (based on caste) and economic status (based on education and employment). To belong to a 'reserved category' – the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, and the Other Backward Classes - meant access to education and jobs on terms which were more favourable than those available to persons who did not belong these categories. It was, therefore, important to preserve, and be aware of, one's caste identity because thanks to 'reservation' – the scope of which was greatly extended by the Mandal Commission – it was the proverbial goose that laid golden eggs. Any political party that even remotely suggested that the policy on 'reservation' should be diluted or phased out – for example, on the grounds that it was unfair to persons in the non-reserved categories or that it might impact adversely on quality - would, in effect, be committing electoral suicide.[9]

Nonetheless, a conversation that Indians need to have amongst themselves - but, given the emotive nature of the topic, probably will not have - is about the costs and benefits of reservation in a post-Mandal society in which the reserved category is defined so widely. There can be little doubt that, but for reservation, many students, currently in institutions of higher education for which entry is highly competitive, would not be there (Vishnu, 2015). [10] It is perfectly reasonable to ask whether the presence of the 'less qualified' dilutes the quality of education offered by such institutions with the result that they turn out, for example, doctors and engineers who have been subjected to less than rigorous intellectual scrutiny. To ask such a question is *not* to suggest that they *should not* be admitted. There may well be compelling social arguments, including the need to blunt discrimination against persons from the backward castes, why reservation should be continued. These reasons

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[9] As happened with the BJP when, on the eve of the 2015 Bihar Assembly elections, one of its senior leaders asked for a rethink on the policy on reservation: He suggested that a "non-political committee" be set up to examine who needs the benefit of reservation and for how long (NDTV, 22 September 2015, http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/rss-chief-mohan-bhagwats-statement-on-reservation-sparks-debate-1220171, accessed 26 November 2015)

[10] For example, Vishnu (2015) reports that in the academic year 2014-15 the elite Indian Institutes of Technology admitted 2,029 students from the Scheduled Castes and 856 students from the Scheduled Tribes of whom only 432 and 80, respectively, would have secured admission in open competition based on examination performance.

should, however, be spelled out and set alongside the costs, if any, of reservation. The "golden eggs" argument on its own is a poor reason for continuing with reservation in its present form.

Democracy and Secularism

Another aspect that impacts on electoral outcomes in India is its attitude towards religions, enshrined in its commitment to being a secular nation. Secularism in India, however, means something very different from that in France which, too, prides itself on being secular. The French attitude to secularism, enshrined in its principle of *laïcité,* actively prevents religious interference in state affairs. This dates back to the French Revolution of 1789 and is traditionally understood as a way of controlling the Catholic Church (Hussey, 2014). In India, however, secularism, *in operational terms*, requires avoiding doing or saying anything which might "hurt a community's religious sentiments".[11] So, in France, for example, pupils and staff are forbidden, since February 2004, to conspicuously wear any religious symbols at school, in particular head scarves by Muslims. From April 2007, these rules were also applied to public employees and, in April 2011, the *niqab* was banned from public places. All these laws were based on the principle of secularism (*laïcité*).

In India, on the other hand, the wearing of religious symbols is not only permitted but anyone who objected to, or took action to prevent, such practices would, by "hurting the (relevant) community's religious sentiments", would be viewed as non-secular or, to use a term popular in India, "communal". In France, the right of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo* to publish anti-Islamic cartoons is regarded as a triumph of secularism; in India, the ban on Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, because it would, or might, offend Muslim sentiments, is also a victory for secularism. On the French view of secularism, the sacred is trumped by the profane; from the Indian perspective, the sacred invariably trumps the profane.

There can be little doubt that some actions taken in France, on the principle of *laïcité*, are insensitive to cultural differences and may even appear provocative. The decision of some schools not to offer their Muslim and Jewish pupils any dietary alternative when pork is the main item on the

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[11] There are convoluted attempts to define the Indian concept of secularism. Bhargava (2010), for example, defines a secular state as "not anti-religious but existing and surviving only when religion is no longer hegemonic…it allows freedom of religion but is itself free from religion." It is difficult to see how such a platitudinous definition distinguishes the Indian version of secularism from the French type.

schools' menu is a good example of cultural insensitivity.[12] It is safe to say that, on an Indian view of secularism, a similar situation would not arise.

In India, however, problems arise when what practitioners of a religion find hurtful is taken to unreasonable, indeed unacceptable, extremes. The reluctance to employ persons from the lower castes to cook school meals, in order not to offend upper-caste sensibilities that food touched by lower caste hands is rendered unclean, is an example of such pathology. On the French principle of *laïcité* upper caste children would have to eat food cooked by lower caste persons or else go hungry. The Indian attitude is to tip-toe around the problem and, with much hand-wringing, attempt to square the circle by expressing sympathy for both points of view.

A consequence of secularism in India is that each religion has an incentive to preserve its identity in undiluted form – immune to any proposals for reform - because such proposals, by "hurting its sentiments", would, fall foul of the secular principle. The upshot is that the same heightened sense of identity that reservation policies provide the backward caste groups is provided by secularism to religious groups.

Arguably, Muslims in France and India have, in different ways, been most affected by each country's particular concept of secularism. In France, Muslims, more than other religious group, have been subject to the full rigour of *laïcité* in terms of how they lead their public and personal lives. In India, the policy towards Muslims has been one of non-interference, most particularly with respect to Muslim personal law.

As regards the latter, a Muslim man in India can divorce his wife by simply saying *talaq* (divorce) thrice and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board declared in September 2015 that there was no scope of change in the triple *talaq* system.[13] Notwithstanding court judgements to the contrary, Muslim husbands who divorce their wives are not required to pay them alimony. This is due to the (INC inspired) Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 which gave Muslim women the right to maintenance for only three months after divorce after which the onus of

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[12] The Guardian, 13 October 2015, "Pork or Nothing: How School Dinners are Dividing France", http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/pork-school-dinners-france-secularism-children-religious-intolerance, accessed 30 November 2015.

[13] *First Post*, http://www.firstpost.com/india/no-scope-of-change-in-triple-talaq-system-says-all-india-muslim-personal-law-board-2419482.html, accessed 27 November 2015.

their maintenance was on their relatives.[14] Yet, no attempt is made to establish basic rights for Muslim women, in the form of protection from arbitrary divorce, or maintenance payments in the event of divorce, because it would be tantamount to attacking 'Muslim identity' and, therefore, fall foul of the secularism principle. This is notwithstanding the fact that Article 44 of the Indian Constitution specifically requires the State to secure for its citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.

The failure to bring Muslims into mainstream life in India has, in fact, failed Muslims. The Sachar Committee (2006) in its report to the government of India quantified and highlighted the backwardness of Indian Muslims. This Report drew attention to a number of areas of disadvantage: *inter alia* the existence of Muslim ghettos stemming from their concern with physical security; low levels of education engendered by the poor quality of education provided by schools in Muslim areas; pessimism that education would lead to employment; difficulty in getting credit from banks; the poor quality of public services in Muslim areas. In consequence, as the Committee reported: one in four Muslim 6-14 year olds had never attended school; less than 4 percent of India's graduates were Muslim, notwithstanding that Muslims comprised 13 percent of India's population; only 13 percent of Muslims were engaged in regular jobs, with Muslims holding less than 3 percent of jobs in India's bureaucracy.[15]

One of the reasons for protecting Muslim identity in India is because it is acknowledged that Muslims – who, according to the 2011 Census, comprise 14 percent of the population, with about 170 million adherents - play a crucial role in determining electoral outcomes in India. On one estimate, Muslim voters play a decisive role in determining the outcomes in about 100 (of the total of 543) constituency elections.[16] At the same time, there are a large number of parties, national and regional, competing for the Muslim vote: *inter alia* the INC, the *Rashtriya Janata Dal*, the *Samajwadi Party*, the *Aam Aadmi Party*, the *All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen*, and the *All-India United*

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[14] *The Hindu*, http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2003/08/10/stories/2003081000221500.htm, accessed 27 November 2015.
[15] In 1865, Napoleon III gave Algerian Muslims the right to be governed, in non-criminal cases, by Islamic law rather than the French Civil Code with the result that Muslims "had no control or stake in the country in which they lived" (Hussey, 2014).
[16] Deutsche Welle, 10 April 2014, http://www.dw.com/en/muslims-to-play-key-role-in-indian-elections/a-17558549, accessed 28 November 2015.

Democratic Front, with the latter two being explicitly Muslim parties. Paralleling the earlier discussion on reservations, any political party in India that suggested measures that might, even remotely, be construed as an attack on Muslim identity would have to suffer the consequences of losing the Muslim vote.

Democracy and National Unity

The last point of note is that there is the feeling that is generated in most Indians that by voting in elections which are regular and frequent and, in large part acknowledged to be free and fair, they are collectively involved in a national project of some importance. The turnout in Indian elections is high: 67% of voters exercised their franchise in the 2014 *Lok Sabha* elections and the average turnout, over the 14 *Lok Sabha* elections between 1962 and 2014, was 59%. The next chapter discusses the myriad reasons that bring voters to the polling booth – party loyalty, the desire to reward or punish candidates, the prospect of material gain – but, in general, as Banerjee (2014) argues, "for many Indian voters, voting is not just a means to elect a government…rather the very act of voting is seen by them as meaningful, as an end in itself, that expresses the virtues of citizenship, accountability, and civility that they wish to see in ordinary life, but rarely can. " (p. 3).

Needless to say, an appreciation of possessing the right to elect one's government is not spread evenly across the country. If one views India, as Rudolph and Rudolph (2002) do, as a multinational federation, rather than as a nation state, with more in common with the European Union than with the United States of America, then it is not surprising that, at various times, some parts of the country have been excluded from the democratic process: elections in Assam and Punjab could not be held during the 1984 *Lok Sab*ha elections (but were held in 1985); elections in Assam could not be held during the 1989 *Lok Sabha* elections because electoral rolls were incomplete; elections in Punjab could not be held during the 1991 *Lok Sab*ha elections (but were held in 1992); and the 1991 *Lok Sabha* elections in Jammu and Kashmir were boycotted in all its constituencies.[17]

Some commentators, most recently Anderson (2012), have seized upon these aberrations - and on the civil unrest that engendered them and upon the raft of legislation enacted to supress such unrest - to draw attention to the deficiencies of Indian democracy. It is undoubtedly true that many of

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[17] Srinagar, Ladakh, Baramulla, Anantnag, Jammu and Udampur.

these legislative measures, listed in Anderson (2012)[18] , suborn the democracy that they purport to defend. Of these, none is more odious than the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (1958) - which continues to be in effect in Jammu and Kashmir and in India's north-eastern states - under which members of the armed forces can act as though they were in a situation of war: able to stop, search, arrest, and kill without judicial accountability.

That said, the other side of the ledger is that, since independence in 1947, India has elected 16 successive parliaments under the aegis of nearly 10,000 constituency elections. It has never known military rule nor have Indian political leaders, even in the darkest days of the Emergency of 1975-77, ever harboured Presidential ambitions. In terms of geography, it has known serious unrest in only four regions: Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, the north-east, and in the swathe of districts running from Jharkhand to Andhra Pradesh which have come under the influence of Maoist guerrillas. Some of these conflicts are in the past (Punjab) and, in others (the north-east and in Jammu and Kashmir), efforts at a negotiated settlement are under way. Balancing the books, it would take an extraordinary degree of pessimism to envisage a dystopian future for Indian democracy.

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[18] The Preventive Detention Act (1950), Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (1958), Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (1967), Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act (1971), Maintenance of Internal Security Act (1971), National Security Act (1980), Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act (1985), Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act (2002) and the Unlawful Activities Amendment Act (2004).