

## Emerging Political Trends 1977 to 2000

- Write a brief summary of political events discussed about in the previous chapter on Independent India.

In this chapter we will look more closely at political events in contemporary India. Many of these events and issues have sharply divided and even polarised the political landscape of this country. We will see the transformation of the party system with the emergence of a competitive multi-party system. As a result of this change in the party system, no single party was able to form a government on its own and we have a series of coalition governments. In the economic sphere, this period brings about a major shift in the development strategy. The tension between the economics of market and the politics of democracy begins to play itself out during this period. At the same time, old issues of religious and caste differences are repackaged and used for political mobilisation. This chapter will examine these issues of the contemporary period with reference to their impact on the fundamental values of constitution like democracy, unity and integrity and social and economic change.

Both teachers and students are sure to have their own views on the events of this period depending upon their own Convictions, but it is suggested that everyone should try to understand the perspective of others with an open mind and also express their own views with care not to offend other people. The developments discussed in this chapter have important bearing on the

End of Emergency and formation of Janata Party governments under Morarji Desai and Charan Singh	1977
Formation of Congress government led by Indira Gandhi	1980
Formation of TDP	1982
Operation Blue Star and Assassination of Indira Gandhi	1984
Rajiv Gandhi Accords with HS Longowal on Punjab and AASU on Assam	1985
Accord with Mizo National Front	1986
Agreement with Sri Lanka	1987
Election and formation of Janata Dal government with VP Singh and Chandrasekhar	1989
Decision to implement Mandal Commission recommendation	1989
Ram Janmabhoomi Rath Yatra	1990
Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and government led by Congress party with P.V.Narsimha Rao as PM	1991
Economic Liberalisation	1991
Demolition of Babri Masjid	1992
National Front Government with Deve Gowda and IK Gujral as PMs	1996
NDA government led by AB Vajpayee	1998

nature and future of our democratic institutions and we should try to understand their various dimensions. The maturity of our democracy depends upon how we conduct these discussions.

### **Return of democracy after Emergency**

The period between 1975 to 1985 was a testing time for Indian democracy. It began with the state of Emergency in which basic democratic rights were denied and ended with the historic electoral victory of the Congress led by Rajiv Gandhi. Though it began and ended with the rule of the Congress party it saw the emergence of viable alternatives to the Congress at both the Centre and in the States. This effectively prevented India from sliding into a ‘single party democracy’ as it happened in many countries. The emergence of competitive alternatives ensured that Indian voters could always exercise a reasonable choice. This also allowed many different political viewpoints and sectional interests to become active in State level and national politics. Political viewpoints of Socialists, Hindu nationalists, Communists, as well as sectional interests like those of farmers, dalits, backward castes, and regions among others now came to the fore and asserted their claims. At the same time a number of non-political movements like environmental movements, feminist movement, civil liberties movement, literacy movements and so on also emerged and became powerful motors of social change. Let us examine some of these issues in greater detail.

- Do you think ‘single party democracy’ would have been a better alternative to multi-party democracy?
- In what ways does a multi-party democracy create favourable conditions for social movements of protest and change?

### **1977 Elections and the End of Emergency**

When elections were announced in January 1977, it took everyone by surprise. No one had expected elections to be held. Indira Gandhi also released all political prisoners, removed censorship as well as all other regulations in place which restricted freedom of movement, campaigns and meetings. The major opposition parties decided to come together to challenge the Congress. The Congress (O), Swatantra Party, Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Socialist party decided to merge together and form the Janata (peoples) Party. Some important Congress leaders like Jagjivan Ram quit the party to join the anti-Congress front. The other major opposition parties like the DMK, the SAD and the CPI (M) chose to maintain their separate identities but supported the Janata Party in a common front against the Congress. Senior leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya JB Kriplani played an important role in bringing together all the anti-Congress and anti-Emergency parties to fight the elections. It should be noted that some of these parties had diametrically opposite viewpoints on social and political issues.

It was a historic election for Indian democracy. The Congress party was defeated at the national level for the first time. During this period Mr. Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy was unanimously elected as speaker of the 6<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1977. Later, he was elected unopposed, the only President of India to be elected being unanimously supported by all political parties including the opposition Congress party and sworn as the 6<sup>th</sup> President of India on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1977. This shows how the coalition governments have come to stay and political parties started thinking in terms of coalitions setting a new trend in political history. This is in a sense of ushered in the practice of accepting personalities of great statesmanship and who set high standards in public life, being preferred for public offices and certainly a move away from traditional party based politics. During his term of office, Mr. Sanjeeva Reddy had to work with three governments under *Prime Ministers* Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Indira Gandhi.

The victorious Janata Party attempted to consolidate itself by dismissing nine Congress governments in the States. Was the central government justified in dismissing State governments even if they enjoyed majority in their assemblies just because the party ruling in those States had been defeated in the Parliamentary elections? The Janata Party argued that the Congress party had lost its mandate to rule in the States as it had been defeated. Its stand was somewhat vindicated by its victory in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar and the victory of CPI (M) in West Bengal and DMK in Tamil Nadu.

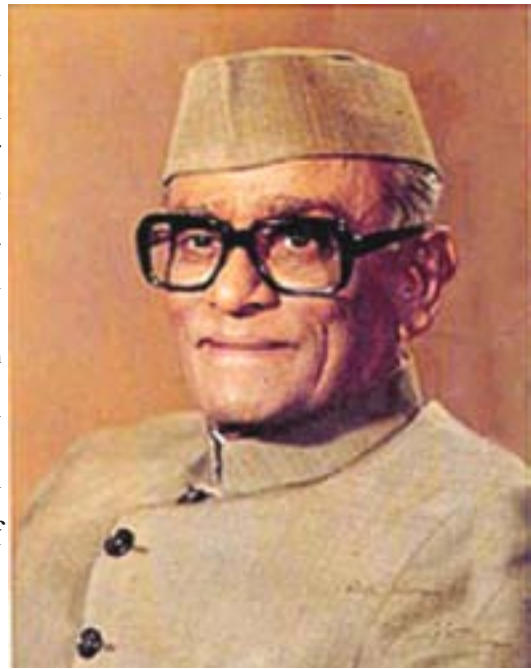


Fig 19.1 : Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy  
6<sup>th</sup> President of India

### Some opposition parties of 1970s

**BLD** – Bharatiya Lok Dal – a party which was formed of socialists who called for special attention to Indian farmers, based mainly in Uttar Pradesh.

**Congress (O)** – The conservative section of the Congress which had opposed the policies of Indira Gandhi.

**CPI (M)** – Communist Party of India (Marxist) – a party with a national presence, which strove for radical land reforms, trade unionism and socialist policies.

**DMK** – Dravida Munnetra Kazagam – a party based mainly in Tamil Nadu which sought greater autonomy and powers for the state.

**Jan Sangh** – A Hindu nationalist party largely confined to the northern States.

**SAD** – Shiromani Akali Dal – a party based in Punjab catering specially to the Sikhs and organised around Gurudwaras. It therefore had a semi religious character. It was also in favour of greater autonomy to the States.



*Fig 19.1 : Morarji Desai  
the First Non Congress  
Prime Minister*

The Janata Party had come to power promising a restoration of democracy and freedom from authoritarian rule. However, the disunity among the partners had a serious effect on the governance and its rule is most often remembered for internal squabbles and defections. The factional struggle in the party soon culminated in the fall of the government within three years leading to fresh elections in 1980.

The Congress returned to power in 1980. The Congress immediately paid back the Janata in the same coin by dismissing the Janata and non-Congress governments in nine States. The Congress was victorious in all the States except Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

The actions of both the Janata Party and Congress governments weakened the federal principles and backed a

### President's Rule

As per the provision of the Constitution (article 356), the governor of a State can recommend to the President the dismissal of a State government and even dissolution of a State assembly if he or she is convinced that the government is not able to administer the State as per the Constitution. The President may then on the advice of the Prime Minister, dismiss the State government and order the Governor to take over the administration of the State.

Since there was no clear guideline in the Constitution in this regard, many central governments often misused article 356 to harass and dismiss State governments headed by opposition parties.

In 1994 in an important judgement the Supreme Court laid down strict norms for the use of article 356 by the Central Government. Since then, such misuse of this power has become rare.

- There have been many instances in which governments at centre removed governments at the state, if they are from different political parties. Discuss how does it violate democratic principles.

more centralising position. This was accompanied by some serious challenges to national unity too. The people of many states felt alienated and wanted either greater autonomy from the centre or even wanted to go separate from India itself. The non-congress regional parties (like SAD and DMK ) meanwhile attempted to come together to form a common front in support of greater say in national level decision making, greater financial autonomy, lower interference in State matters and stopping the misuse of the powers of the Governor and arbitrary imposition of President's Rule.

### Emergence of Regional Aspirations

Let us look at three movements for greater autonomy in different parts of India: Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Punjab. Can you identify the similarities and dissimilarities between these movements? They represented three strands of the demands for autonomy.

## Andhra Pradesh

In Andhra Pradesh, the frequent change of Chief Ministers by the central Congress leadership and the imposition of leaders from above created a bad taste. There was a feeling that the Andhra Pradesh leadership was not getting respect from the national Congress leadership. This was perceived as an insult to the pride of the Telugu people. N T Rama Rao (NTR), popular film actor, chose to take up this cause. He began the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) on his 60th birthday in 1982. He said that the TDP stood for the honour and self respect of the Telugu speaking people (*Teluguvari atma gauravam*). He argued that the State could not be treated as a lower office of the Congress party. Equally important were his promise of some very important welfare measures for the poor including midday meal scheme in government schools, sale of rice at Rs 2 per Kg to the poor and liquor prohibition. These populist measures helped the TDP sweep the 1982 elections. However, he was surreptitiously dismissed by the Governor in 1984 when he was away in the United States for a surgery. The Governor appointed N Bhaskar Rao who had defected from the TDP to the Congress. On his return NTR challenged the action of the Governor and proved that he had the support of majority of the MLAs. After a month of campaigning the central government appointed a new Governor who reappointed NTR as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. In this struggle against arbitrary dismissal, NTR was supported by several parties holding power in States like CPI M, DMK, SAD and National Conference among others.

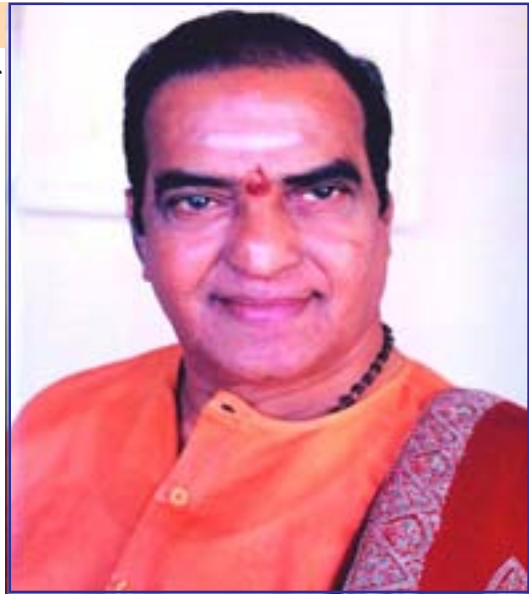


Fig 19.2 : N T Rama Rao

- Discuss the importance of the following factors in the politics of NTR:
  - i. Background of being a film hero
  - ii. Fight for self respect of the state
  - iii. Popular welfare schemes for the poor
  - iv. Alliance with other regional parties

## Assom Movement

A similar but much stronger demand for autonomy was also taking place in Assom. In Assam, besides Assamese, Bengali was also a major spoken language. From the British time, Bengalis occupied the lower and middle rungs of the administration in the State. The Assamese speaking people felt that the Bengali officialdom did not treat them as equals but as second-class citizens. A lot of Bengali speaking people had also settled in Assom after independence and to make matters worse there was also a lot of migration from across the border from Bangladesh. Whenever there was any political instability or natural calamity in the neighbouring country, thousands of people moved into the State creating huge discomfort for

the locals. The local people felt that they would lose their cultural roots and soon be outnumbered by the ‘outsiders’.

In the late 1970s this general feeling of unhappiness was transformed into a social movement. The All Assom Students Union (AASU) was at the forefront of the agitation. This organisation spread across the State and was especially popular among the youth. It led a number of strikes, agitations and marches directed against the central government to make clear its demands -mainly to remove the so-called outsiders.

Besides culture and demographics, there was also an economic dimension. Trade and other establishments were in the hands of non-Assamese communities. The major resources of the State, including tea and oil were again not benefitting the locals. The tea industry was mainly based in Calcutta and the oil industry had very few locals involved despite being in the hands of the public-sector. Furthermore, the oil was being moved out of the State and refined elsewhere. All in all, the dominant thrust of the movement was that Assam was being treated as an “internal colony” and this had to stop. The main demands were that the local people should be given greater preference in employment, the “outsiders” should be removed and the resources should be used for the benefit of the locals.

These demands however created a communal polarisation as most of the outsiders who came from the neighbouring country were Muslims. To make matters worse, the movement soon began to take anti-Bengali, anti-Left (as West Bengal was being ruled by the Left Front), anti-non-Assamese and gradually even an anti-Indian stand. The central government was soon forced to take note of the movement as the violence and disruption increased. The talks between the agitationists and the central government went on for three years before they came to an agreement. An agreement was signed by the Central Govt and the AASU at the initiative of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1984. To restore normalcy, in an unusually magnanimous move the Congress government in the State stepped down and allowed elections even before the end of its term. When elections were held the Assom Gana Parishad (AGP - an offshoot of AASU) came to power.

This political transition however, did not resolve the long term problems which gave rise to the movement. The border with Bangladesh could not be sealed due to both diplomatic reasons and also geographic reasons (given the waterways and hills it is not possible to erect fences everywhere). It was also not possible to really differentiate between old Bengali settlers and fresh immigrants or send back the immigrants. At the same time too much emphasis on ethnic identities had a negative impact on other communities of Assom like the Bodos, Khasis, Mizos and Karbis. Many of them too demanded autonomous status. They began to assert themselves and wanted to drive out people of other communities from their areas. This has led to violent attempts of ‘ethnic cleansing’ or forcible eviction of minority tribal communities by even outright mass killing in many parts of Assom. Often in order

to counter violent activities of one community the governments instigated or armed another community and in this way kept alive the tensions instead of solving them.

The Central Government also stepped up the deployment of armed forces in these areas to reduce tension and bring peace. Three factors influenced the use of armed forces in the North Eastern region: firstly, the fact that it was a sensitive border area adjacent to China, Burma (now Myanmar) and Bangladesh; secondly, the rebel groups often were demanding separation from India and procured arms and help from outside forces; and thirdly, the fact that the rebel groups indulged in large-scale ethnic violence against minority communities. As the Indian armed forces entered this difficult terrain, it led to suspension of civil liberties and freedom and also to giving abnormal powers to the army. The government thought that this was the only way to bring about peace in the area.

Thus what started as a problem between Bengalis and Assamese developed into a complex inter-community conflict in a very sensitive area. The problem of ethnic identities and ethnic assertion therefore requires a broadminded approach rather than narrow minded and quick solutions.

- In what ways do you think the Assom movement is similar or different from the movement of NTR in Andhra Pradesh?
- Organise a debate in your class on the following themes:  
Only one community should live in a region and all posts and trade-business should be in the hands of the people of that specific community only. OR All people of India should be free to move from one part to another and settle and work in places of their choice.
- Will an open policy of free movement of people cause rich and powerful outsiders to buy up all land and resources and leave the original people of a locality poor and impoverished?

## The Punjab Agitation

At the other end of India, another movement for autonomy was taking shape in the State of Punjab. Here too the difference in language and religion of the dominant population became a point of mobilisation. Here again the grouse was that the contribution of the State was being ignored. They also believed that the State had received an unfair bargain when it was created. It laid claims to the new capital city of Chandigarh which remained a union territory directly administered by the Centre. Punjab also claimed more water from Bhakra Nangal dam and greater recruitment of Sikhs in the army.

The Akali Dal had passed a set of resolutions in 1978 during the Janata Party rule in the centre, calling upon the central government to implement them. Its

most significant demand was to amend the Constitution to give more powers to the states and ensure greater decentralisation of powers. The resolution said,

“the Shiromani Akali Dal emphatically urges upon the Janata Government to take cognizance of the different linguistic and cultural sections, religious minorities as also the voice of millions of people and recast the Constitutional structure of the country on real and meaningful federal principles to obviate the possibility of any danger to the unity and integrity of the country and, further, to enable the States to play a useful role for the progress and prosperity of the Indian people in their respective areas by a meaningful exercise of their powers.”

With the increasing electoral competition between the SAD and the Congress, things took a turn for the worse. The dismissal of the Akali government and the return of the Congress in 1980 only added to already surcharged atmosphere and the feeling that the Sikhs were being discriminated against. A series of untoward incidents followed, increasing the alienation/ distance between the Sikhs and the central government. Bhindranwale, the leader of the group of militant Sikhs began to preach separatism and also demanded the formation of a Sikh State- Khalistan. This was a period of intense turmoil in the State. The militants tried to impose an orthodox life code on all Sikhs and even non-sikhs of Punjab. There was also a communal colour to the conflict. People belonging to non-Sikh communities were subjected to communal attacks. All this finally culminated in the occupation of the Golden Temple by the Sikh separatist groups and the army had to intervene to vacate



*Fig 19.3 : during the 1970's and 1980's India made many different achievements in Technology co-operative's etc., some examples are like in above Sriharikota launch of PSLV, Amul cooperative etc.,*



the premises. This was seen as an act of desecration of the holiest shrine of the Sikhs and increased their alienation.

A fallout of all this was the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. This was followed by rioting especially in Delhi in which thousands of Sikhs were attacked, murdered and their properties destroyed. The administration seemed to do little to stop the violence.

After Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister, he held talks with SAD and entered into an agreement with Sant Langowal, the SAD president. Though fresh elections were held in Punjab and SAD won them, the peace was short lived as Longowal was assassinated by the militants.

In April 1986, an assembly at the Akal Takht, made a declaration of an independent state of Khalistan. Several groups claiming to be fighters for an independent state formed armed detachments and engaged in terrorist activities. The government of India claimed that these groups were actively supported by the government of Pakistan. This was a decade of violence and conflict in Punjab. The period of insurgency saw clashes of the Sikh militants with the police, as well as with other religious groups. Journalists, politicians, artists and activists who did not conform to militant-approved behaviour were killed. There were indiscriminate attacks designed to cause extensive civilian casualties: derailing trains, exploding bombs in markets, restaurants, and other civilian areas between Delhi and Punjab. In 1991 alone about a thousand people were killed. The militants were also engaged in large scale kidnapping and extortion to raise funds for their work. All this gradually alienated them from the mass of the Punjabi people including Sikhs. Over a period of time effective police action broke the back of militancy and as public sympathy declined rapidly, peace finally returned to Punjab by the end of the 1990s.

However, the Government used very harsh methods for the suppression of militancy in Punjab, many of which were seen as violation of Constitutional rights of citizens. Many observers felt that such violations of Constitutional rights and human rights were justified as the Constitutional machinery was on the edge of collapse due to militant activity. Even judges were afraid of passing adverse judgements on the militants for fear of reprisals by them. Other observers felt that such use of extra constitutional powers by the state cannot be justified and in the long run it would strengthen undemocratic tendencies in the polity.

- What was the role of anti-sikh riots of Delhi in 1984 in fuelling Sikh separatism and extremism?
- Compare the similarities and differences between Assam and Punjab movements. What kind of challenges did they pose to our political system?
- The way the government handled the two problems, did it strengthen our democratic polity or weaken it?

## New initiatives in the Rajiv Gandhi Era



Fig 19.4 : Rajiv Gandhi

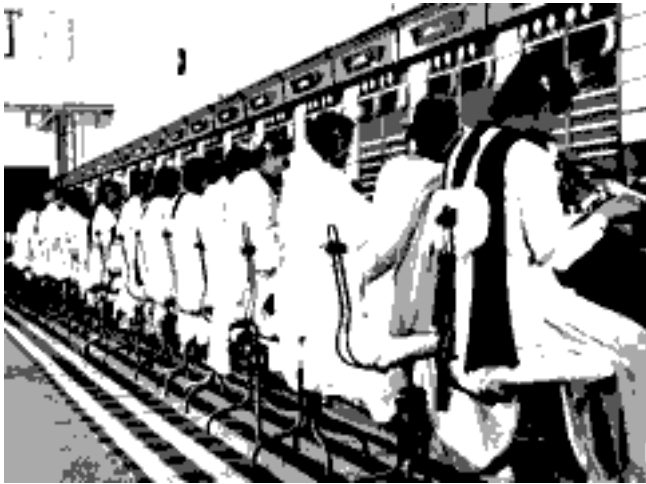


Fig 19.5 : Operators at work in the New Delhi Telephone Exchange - c1950's

the story of the poor remained the same. The fact that most people who had been poor and marginalised including, women, dalits and tribals were not getting access to the fruits of development. He also realised that there needed to be sea change in the way things were being done. Rajiv Gandhi felt that the best way to do this was to ensure the participation of the mass of the people in governance by activating the Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, many State governments, especially,

The Congress led by Rajiv Gandhi won an unprecedented victory in the elections. Rajiv Gandhi began a peace initiative in Punjab, Assam and Mizoram and also in the neighbouring country of Sri Lanka. India sent its army to maintain peace between the warring parties (Separatist Tamils and Sinhalese government), but this turned out to be a misadventure as it was not accepted by either the Tamils or the Sri Lankan government and the force was finally withdrawn in 1989.

Rajiv Gandhi realised that despite all the attention to development in the country, much of it did not reach the real beneficiaries. In a famous speech Rajiv Gandhi said that out of every Rupee spent on the poor barely 15 paise reaches them! It highlighted the fact that despite huge increases in development expenditure,

- Looking back from the present, what do you think were the lasting contributions of Rajiv Gandhi to the country?
- Discuss in your class why the poorest people often do not get to benefit from schemes intended for them. What long term steps should be taken to ensure that such benefits really reach the poor?
- Find out and list all the benefits students of your school are entitled to. Do they manage to get them properly? Discuss in both the class and outside the school in your homes or playground.

those run by opposition parties felt that it was an attempt to by pass them and reduce their powers.

In the economic sphere, too Rajiv Gandhi attempted to chart a different course. His government's first budget in 1985 moved towards a more liberalised system by removing some of the checks and controls that were in place.

Rajiv Gandhi was also convinced that India needed to adapt itself to the new technologies emerging in the world, especially computer and telecommunication technologies. He initiated what is called the 'telecom revolution' in India which speeded up and spread the network of telephonic communication in the country using satellite technology.

### Rise of Communalism and Corruption in High places

After the horrors of partition there had been some attempt to keep religion away from the active and formal political sphere. This period however saw the emergence of new kind of political mobilisation which had communal overtones. This use of religion for political purposes and the partisan role of the government was to lead to disastrous consequences which would raise question marks on the issue of national unity and integrity.

#### The Prime Minister's Apology

Dr. Manmohan Singh's statement in the Rajya Sabha

... Four thousand people were killed in this great national tragedy that took place in 1984. This should be an occasion for introspection, how working together as a united nation, we can find new pathways to ensure that such ghastly tragedies never again take place in our country. ... I have no hesitation in apologising not only to the Sikh community but the whole Indian nation because what took place in 1984 is the negation of the concept of nationhood and what is enshrined in our Constitution. So, I am not standing on any false prestige. On behalf of our Government, on behalf of the entire people of this country, I bow my head in shame that such a thing took place. But, Sir, there are ebbs, there are tides in the affairs of nations. The past is with us. We cannot rewrite the past. But as human beings, we have the willpower and we have the ability to write better future for all of us.... ([pmindia.nic.in/RS%20speech.pdf](http://pmindia.nic.in/RS%20speech.pdf))  
11 Aug 2005.

- What is the most important message in this speech?
- What signals does this speech send out?
- Why is it important that the Prime Minister made this speech?

In 1985 the Supreme Court passed a judgement on a case filed by Shah Bano who had been divorced by her husband ordering that she should be paid maintenance by her ex-husband. While the progressive Muslims welcomed the decision, others

protested against this judgement saying that it went against Islamic law and that if this was allowed then there may be further interference in the religious life of the community. The leaders of women's movement and those who stood for reform within the Muslim society argued that it would help to reverse the gross injustice being meted out to Muslim women who were divorced unilaterally by their husbands. The government came under pressure of the orthodox sections and enacted a new law in 1986 which let off Muslim husbands and permitted Muslim religious bodies to pay maintenance to divorced women for a short period of 3 months. This was widely seen as compromising before religious orthodoxy and ignoring the interests of women of the community.

Around the same time some sections of the Hindus had begun a campaign for building a temple for Lord Rama in Ayodhya in the place of the controversial construction, Babri Masjid. They claimed that it was the birth place of Lord Rama and it has been built by destroying the earlier temple. The custodians of Babri Masjid denied this and claimed this was a place of worship for Muslims. This had been under dispute for some time and the Court had ordered it be kept closed except on one day in a year till the final decision was taken. In 1986 the Court ordered that the mosque may be kept open on all days and allow Hindus to perform worship on a daily basis. It was widely believed that this could happen only because the central government approved of this decision. This opening up of the temple helped those who wanted to convert the mosque into a temple to mobilise a large number of people.

To many observers it appeared that the established political parties were losing popularity among the people. Large number of popular movements were emerging over a number of issues under non-political leaderships. The large farmers producing for market were fighting for better prices for agricultural products and greater subsidy for inputs like diesel, fertilisers and electricity. Farmers of UP and Haryana agitated under the leadership of Mahendra Singh Tikait, while farmers of Maharashtra were fighting under the leadership of Sharad Joshi. In many States movements of adivasis and farmers against displacement by development projects like dams and mines was also building up. The observers felt that this decline in popularity led the national political parties to pander to religious feelings in both Hindu and Muslim communities so as to retain their support in elections. However, it weakened the secular fabric of Indian polity and made way for rise of communal politics in the following decade.

Around the same time charges began to be levied against several leaders that they had directly or indirectly received bribes from the Swedish manufacturers of guns being supplied to the Indian army. Even though these charges could never be proved clearly, a powerful campaign was led by some former ministers of cabinet itself like V P Singh. The issue of corruption in administration and in political circles became the main plank of the election campaign for non-congress political

forces in the next elections held in 1989. Once the non-congress parties irrespective of their differences amongst themselves got together, it became difficult for the Congress to win. Though the Congress returned with the highest number of seats, it did not have enough to form a government on its own. The first coalition government led by V P Singh's Janata Dal was formed.

## The Era of Coalition politics

The 1990s were years of very significant change in post Independence India. With the transformation to a competitive multi-party system, it became near impossible for any single party to win a majority of the seats and form a government of its own. Since 1989, all governments that had formed at the national level have been either coalition or minority governments. A number of national and regional parties had to come together to form governments at the centre. This meant that the political ideologies and programmes of a number of parties had to be accommodated and a common agreement had to be arrived at. Thus no party could pursue its extreme agendas and had to tone down their approaches. While this enabled the central government to become more sensitive to multiple viewpoints in politics and policy matters, it also caused considerable instability. Even small parties tried to gain undue advantage as the withdrawal of their support could cause the fall of the government. Sometime this also caused 'policy paralysis' – as the coalition could not implement any policy which called for serious change for fear of withdrawal of support by one or the other partners.

While the early coalition governments were highly instable and did not last their full terms, the later coalitions have put in place multiple mechanisms like common minimum programmes and coordination committees to bring about greater understanding between the partners. Later coalitions like the BJP led National Democratic Alliance and the Congress led United Progressive Alliance have completed their terms. Moreover, the UPA was the first coalition to be re-elected.



Fig 19.6 : VP. Singh

- While some people feel that coalition politics has weakened the government, others feel that it has prevented any party from steamrolling its agenda on the country. Discuss this with examples.

## The 'Left Front Government' in West Bengal

The Left wing political parties like the Communist Party of India (CPI), Forward Block, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Communist Party of India Marxist (CPM) won the elections in the State of West Bengal in 1977 and formed the Left Front Government led by Jyoti Basu of CPM. One of its most important programmes was to carry out the unfinished tasks of land reforms in the State. In June 1978, the

West Bengal government launched Operation Barga to record the names of the sharecroppers (Bargadars who tilled the land belonging to landlords and paid a large share of the produce as rent to them), who formed a major part of the agrarian population in West Bengal and to secure their rights. Operation Barga depended heavily on collective action by the sharecroppers and panchayati raj institutions thus avoiding bureaucratic delays and domination of the landowning classes. Officials held camps in the villages in which the various stakeholders would meet and discuss their issues. A list of claimants would be drawn up immediately after, and publicly verified in the presence of the landholders, who could then record their objections. Then, the names of the bargadars would be recorded on the spot, and all legal documents would be issued and distributed immediately.

As a result of Operation Barga, the landlords were largely prevented from forcibly throwing the bargadars off the land. In fact, the bargadar rights were made hereditary and thus perpetual. Secondly, the State guaranteed that the bargadars would receive a fair share of the crop (75 per cent if the bargadar provided the non-labour inputs and 50 per cent if the landlord provides those inputs). In all, approximately half of rural households in West Bengal have received land reform benefits.

As a result of these measures agricultural production in West Bengal increased




- Compare the land reforms in West Bengal and the land reforms in Vietnam or China. In what ways were they similar or different?
- Why do you think the protection of sharecroppers led to an increase in production?

almost by 30% and rural poverty declined significantly. However, many critics felt that still the majority of shareholders of West Bengal (about 70%) have not been registered and this partial implementation has led to the rise of a new class of rural rich.

Nevertheless Operation Barga and the implementation of Panchayati Raj helped

the Left Front to gain substantial support of the rural population and the government repeatedly won elections till 2006. This is one of the ways in which the needs of the people of the State was addressed through democratic means.

#### *Coalition Governments and some political parties from 1980's*

Governing Parties	Governing Parties	Governing Parties
<div style="text-align: center;">   National Front 1989-1990         </div> JD; DMK; AGP; TDP ; Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC)	<div style="text-align: center;">   United Front 1996-1998         </div> JKNC ; TDP; TMC; CPI; AGP; DMK; MGP; Samajwadi Party	<div style="text-align: center;">   National Democratic Alliance 1998-2004         </div> JDU; SAD; AIADMK, JKNC; Trinamool Congress; Biju Janata Dal ; Shiva Sena ;
<b>Supporting Parties</b> CPM; CPI, BJP	<b>Supporting Parties</b> CPM	<b>Supporting Parties</b> TDP
This is not a complete list of political parties that either supported for were part of the government. Often we have listed only those parties that had more 5 or MPs		

## Political concerns in the last decade of 20th century

This shift in politics was accompanied by some other significant developments. On the one hand India was forced to open up and 'liberalise' its economy by allowing freer flow of foreign capital and goods into India; on the other hand new social groups asserted themselves politically for the first time; and finally religious nationalism and communal political mobilisation became important features of our political life. All this put the Indian society into great turmoil. We are still coming to grips with these changes and adapt ourselves to them.

### Extention of Constitutional Privileges

The Janata Dal, focussed on the need for inclusive development and ensuring opportunities for people from backward communities. The National Front government resurrected the Mandal Commission report which had recommended reservations for other backward castes (OBC) in government employment and educational facilities. The V P Singh government announced that it was implementing the core recommendation of the Commission by reserving 27% of the seats in government employment for candidates from the socially and educationally backward castes that were identified by the Commission. This order sparked numerous protests especially in north India. In the south, most States already had a high proportion of the seats reserved for the OBCs. Most of the other political parties were not in favour of this decision of V P Singh government, but did not want to oppose it as they feared that they will become unpopular. This was because during the previous two decades, many of the OBC castes had become rich and asserted themselves. They had especially benefitted from land reforms and green revolution, but found that they did not have adequate representation in education, government service and even in politics. They now began to demand their share in these spheres. The V P Singh government tried to address this demand by implementing the Mandal Commission recommendations. Thus gradually all political parties came to

### Panchayati Raj & 73rd amendment

In 1992 government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao passed an important amendment to the Constitution to provide local self governments a Constitutional Status. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment created institutions of local self government at the village level while the 74th Constitutional Amendment did the same in towns and cities. These were pathbreaking amendments. They sought to usher in for the first time, office bearers at the local level elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. One third of the seats were to be reserved for women. Seats were also reserved for scheduled castes and tribes. The concerns of the State governments were taken into account and it was left to the States to decide on what functions and powers were to be devolved to their respective local self governments. Consequently, the powers of local self governments vary across the country.

accept the assertion of the OBCs in Indian politics. This process also meant that Indian polity in general became more sensitive to caste issues and especially the problems faced by the lower castes. Many parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party claiming to represent the interests of the dalits and many regional parties which represented emergent castes like the Yadavs and Jats became important in Indian politics.

### **Use of religion and politics**

The political tendency that seeks to build our nation based on religious identity of the majority of the population, i.e. the Hindus is led by Bharatiya Janata Party. This party believes that ideas of democracy and secularism are western ideas and are not sufficient and what is needed is to draw upon ancient Indian culture. The BJP however opposes the idea of a religious priesthood run theocratic state. The BJP has opened the debate on the nature of secularism by asserting that a secular state; not to give special treatment to minorities, but common civil code is to be applicable to all.

This tendency was largely on the margins of Indian politics till the 1980s. For example in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections they won only 2 seats. However, BJP made great strides when it took up the Ayodhya issue – it decided to campaign for the building of a temple at the site of mosque claiming that it was the site of birth of Lord Rama. In 1990 L K Advani, the leader of BJP led a “*Rath Yatra*” from Somnath to Ayodhya in support of these demands. During the campaign the BJP tried to argue that the secular politics was trying to ignore the interests of the Hindu majority while appeasing minority communities, especially the Muslims. This campaign was accompanied by intense communal polarisation causing a large number of communal conflicts and finally ended with the arrest of L K Advani in Bihar. The BJP responded to this arrest by withdrawing support to V P Singh government and forcing early elections.

During this election campaign, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by LTTE, a Tamil separatist group of Sri Lanka as retaliation for his role in sending Indian army to Sri Lanka. In the sympathy wave that followed the Congress came to power in the Centre, but the BJP’s strength had gone up to 120 in the Lok Sabha. In 1992, a large crowd mobilised on behalf of the temple campaign gathered in Ayodhya and destroyed the mosque. This event sparked off widespread protests and also communal riots in which hundreds of people were killed.

### **Economic liberalisation**

In 1991, when the V P Singh government fell, India was facing very serious economic crises. Its reserve of foreign currency with which it repaid its loans and paid for imports, had been virtually exhausted. This meant that India would have to default in payments to foreign countries unless it urgently got some loan. In 1992,



when the new Congress government under P V Narasimha Rao was formed it negotiated with the International Monetary Fund for loans to tide over the crises. The IMF laid down certain stringent conditions (called ‘structural adjustment programme’), forcing India to accept a policy of liberalisation. This meant

- a. drastic reduction of government expenditure – including cuts in subsidies to farmers, expenditure on public services, health, etc.
- b. reducing restrictions and taxes on import of foreign goods
- c. reducing restrictions on foreign investments in India
- d. opening of many sectors of the economy (like telephone, banking, airlines, etc) to private investors (these were government monopolies earlier)

These measures brought in foreign goods and forced Indian business to compete with global manufacturers. It also led to the setting up of industries and business by foreign companies in India. However, it also meant a lot of hardship for the common people as the government was forced to cut subsidies to the people and as many factories closed down due to influx of cheap foreign goods. This also led to privatisation of many public amenities like education, health, and transport and people had to pay high prices to private service providers.

The twentieth century closed with an India which was drawn into the world market, an India which seemed to have a thriving democracy in which voices of different sections of the population were making themselves heard and in which divisive and communal political mobilisation were threatening to destroy social peace. It had stood the test of time for over fifty years and had built a relatively stable economy and deeply rooted democratic politics. It still had not managed to solve the problem of acute poverty and gross inequality between castes, communities, regions and gender. This was the legacy which 50 years of post-independence period left for the 21st century India.



*Fig 19.7 : P.V. Narasimha Rao*



*Fig 19.8 : H. D. Deve Gowda*



*Fig 19.9 : A.B. Vajpayee*

## Conclusion

We have seen that Indian democracy has been able to withstand numerous challenges and in the process strengthen itself. Indian democracy would be called successful on many indicators, including free, fair and regular elections, voter

turnouts, and government turnovers, empowerment of new groups and maintenance of essential civil liberties. Yet by the turn of the century, there were also many questions being asked of India's democracy. Despite being a continuous democracy, why hasn't India been able to take care of the well being of large number of its citizens? How would India tackle the increased tensions between the contradictory demands and tensions of the development process? Why has the democratic India not been able to dent the established social and economic inequalities? These are questions that Indian democracy will have to grapple with in the years to come. Do you think India will be able to do so?

### Key words

Regional aspirations  
Majority

Coalition governments  
Minority

Communalism

### Improve your learning

#### 1. Match the Following

economic liberalisation

arbitrary dismissal

ethnic cleansing

federal principle

restriction in foreign import tax

of state governments by central government

towards people who are different from themselves

greater autonomy for state governments

2. Identify the major changes in party system during the second phase of Independence.
3. What are the major economic policies discussed in this and the previous chapters of various governments at the centre and the state. How are they similar or different?
4. How did regional aspirations lead to the formation of regional parties? Compare the similarities and differences between the two different phases.
5. In order to form governments it becomes necessary for political parties to attract people from different sections of society. How did different political parties realise these objectives in the second phase after independence?
6. What were the developments that weakened the inclusive nature of Indian polity? How is the ability to accommodate different communities and regional aspirations changing?
7. How do different types of regional aspirations draw from cultural, and economic dimensions?
8. In the early half of India after independence there was importance given to planned development. In the later part emphasis was given to liberalisation. Discuss and find out how does it reflect political ideals?
9. Study newspapers and magazines to identify at least one example each of moderation in policies due to coalition and how do different political parties in coalition emphasise their regional demands?