

REGIONAL REFLECTIONS

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COMPARING POLITICS ACROSS INDIA'S STATES

edited by
Rob Jenkins

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Dedicated to
PROF PAUL HIRST
(1946–2003)

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November 2003

R. J. BRIGHTON

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1

Introduction

Rob Jenkins

This book serves two complementary purposes: it responds to academic interest in four key areas in the study of Indian democracy; and by doing so through a series of two-state comparisons, the book also demonstrates the range of methods by which comparative analysis, within the confines of a single nation-state, can contribute to the study of social and political change. There is an element of evangelism in this approach, for what unites the otherwise extremely diverse contributions to this volume is a core belief that scholars concerned with the practice of actually existing democracy—and the puzzles left in the wake of continuous democratization—would do well to apply the intra-national comparative case-study method.

Each of the eight chapters examines a distinct analytical problem from the perspective of a two-state comparison. The subject matter ranges from the reasons why markedly different institutional inheritances and patterns of socio-political change in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka nevertheless produced (at least until 1999) such similar party and electoral systems, to an explanation for the differing levels of communal violence in Uttar Pradesh and Kerala. True to the book's dual aim, the answers to these and other questions are both illuminating about the nature of democratic practice in contemporary India and instructive about questions of how and on what scale to apply the comparative method. The Andhra-Karnataka comparison, for

instance, underscores the importance of 'political management', or what might be termed 'the art of governance', that is only now receiving the attention it deserves in the study of Indian politics. The explanation for the UP-Kerala discrepancy, on the other hand, reveals an important *methodological* caveat by finding that local-level variables, rather than those manifested state-wide, can best predict the extent of communal violence.

The eight chapters are divided into four thematic areas, each containing two chapters. The themes—Economic Policymaking, Subaltern Politicization, Civic Engagement, and Political Leadership—represent four key aspects of the concrete reality of democratic politics. Each of these is a topic of intense academic and political debate within India and beyond. For instance, close scrutiny of the political processes underlying so-called 'second generation' economic reforms in India, especially at the state level, has created a large demand among students of institutional change for detailed analyses that address crucial theoretical concerns, not least the determinants of foreign-investment promotion and performance. The process by which subaltern groups have become politicized has varied enormously from state to state, and the two chapters treating this issue help to account for some of this variation. The section of the book dealing with the dynamics of India's extremely vibrant civil society examines both economic (corruption) and social (ethnic conflict) issues, but in ways that transcend these artificial disciplinary divisions. Jenkins's chapter on corruption analyses issues of concern to political sociologists (such as the influence of caste identities on the evolution of social movements) while Varshney's chapter on Hindu-Muslim rioting examines such economic factors as the role played by business associations in maintaining communal peace. Interest in the issue of political leadership, on the other hand, is not confined to these disciplines, but has drawn in anthropologists and students of cultural studies.

GAPS IN THE EXISTING LITERATURE

The notion of India as a laboratory of democracy is now a commonplace. Even those without a detailed understanding of its politics grasp the degree to which—in the twenty-first century as much as in the mid-twentieth, when it was born—democratic India represents a bold experiment. In transplanting ideas and institutions from one historical

context to another, the founders of independent India were challenging a number of widely held beliefs: that sustaining democracy required relative affluence; that extreme cultural diversity would imperil state unity; that rule-governed institutions could not survive in the face of conflicting legal traditions. An avalanche of scholarship has examined the results of this experiment, with the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence in 1997 having provided an opportunity for much reflection.

But this is just one of two senses in which India constitutes a laboratory of democracy. For the very diversity that seemed at first a threat to its survival as a unified democratic state has also been manifested institutionally in the form of a federal political system. Indeed, many commentators have attributed the longevity of political pluralism in India to the existence of a robust form of federalism that serves to combat tendencies towards over-centralization of power, create opportunities for the expression of voice,¹ and quarantine political conflicts within regional arenas before they can engulf the apex of the political system.²

But whether or not India's federal system has helped to *preserve* democracy, it has certainly enhanced the capacity of political scientists to *analyse* it. India's federal system has created 29 'mini-democracies' with almost identical institutional infrastructures, at least in terms of the formal systems of representation. India's States, moreover, operate under a set of common conditions, including New Delhi's foreign and economic policy framework and the legal protections enshrined in the Indian Constitution. These control variables represent a major boon to students of comparative politics who seek to understand and explain the divergent patterns and outcomes that the practice of democracy can produce. Cross-national comparisons between democratic systems are unable to control for institutional characteristics or the policy and external environment to anything like the same degree.

1. Alfred Stepan locates Indian federalism closer to the 'demos enabling' form than to the 'demos constraining' variety, the two poles of the spectrum contained in his theoretical article, 'Toward a New Comparative Politics of Federalism, (Multi)Nationalism, and Democracy: Beyond Rikerian Federalism', in A. Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 315–61.

2. See Myron Weiner, 'The Indian Paradox: Violent Social Conflict and Democratic Politics', in Myron Weiner (ed.), *The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989).

It is in this sense—the creation of a controlled environment for assessing the causes of change—that India's federal system provides a laboratory of democracy.³

Given this laboratory-like setting,⁴ it is surprising how few studies of Indian politics have been based on an inter-state comparative approach. While a number of edited volumes on Indian politics explore a single issue or theme by examining its manifestation in several regional contexts, the individual state-level cases are by and large studied in isolation, not in a fundamentally comparative framework.

For instance, the volume on Hindu nationalism edited by Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot,⁵ to which three of the authors in this collection also contributed, provided an illuminating glimpse of the range of ways in which politicized Hinduism had expressed itself in a number of India's states. But each chapter dealt with just a single state. While the editorial introduction of that volume provided valuable reflections on some of the general patterns of divergence and convergence to have emerged across the single-state case studies, the editors were constrained by the diversity of approaches taken by the contributors and the tendency for terms to be used differently by each author. This has been the norm in the study of Indian politics, especially in those volumes devoted to the dynamics of provincial political systems generally,⁶ but also those related to specific themes, such as patterns of political transformation.⁷

3. This second usage comes from Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Kohli was seeking to identify political variables that could account for inter-state variations in poverty-reduction.

4. The idea that units contained within a common governance framework could act as laboratory for political innovation has occurred to analysts of classical Greece as much as to students of contemporary politics. Bertrand Russell's treatment of Aristotle's *Politics*, for instance, noted that 'Greece, owing to its division into independent cities, was a laboratory of political experiment'. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000 [1946]), p. 196.

5. *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), which contains articles by Manor, Jaffrelot, and Jenkins.

6. In this now outmoded genre can be found Iqbal Narain (ed.), *State Politics in India* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1967); Myron Weiner (ed.), *State Politics in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); and John R. Wood (ed.), *State Politics in Contemporary India: Crisis or Continuity?* (Boulder: Westview, 1984).

7. The most notable entry in this category is Francine R. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao, *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, vols I and II (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989 and 1990).

Kohli's work has been one of the main exceptions to this pattern,⁸ and Kohli refers specifically to India's potential as a laboratory for controlled experiments in democracy, and the utility of comparative analysis in explaining expectation-defying variations across states. It is a hopeful sign that in recent years Kohli's challenge has been taken up by both younger and more established scholars of Indian democracy. Kanchan Chandra has employed inter-state analysis in a number of publications on the nature of caste mobilization⁹—a subject covered in Part II of the present volume. A recent article by Harriss, which sought to explain differential poverty-reducing performance across India's states, not only exemplified the trend towards inter-regional political analysis, but explicitly commented on the need for more comparative studies of this sort. As Harriss put it, 'the apparent opportunities [to explore inter-regional variations in patterns of political change] have not been taken up very much.'¹⁰

That Harriss's concern was economic performance (and the political determinants thereof) points to one area where inter-state analysis has been taken up with vigour: the field of policy studies (a subset of which is treated in Part I of this book). This literature has taught political scientists two main lessons for comparative analysis. First, inter-state analysis can force regional specialists to reassess the political narratives they have settled upon for states they have, in some instances, spent many years researching. Comparative analysis can lead to a re-framing of debates, and a questioning of underlying assumptions. A recent study of variations in popular participation in development schemes—which examined Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal—used this intra-national comparative method to demonstrate the way in which the configuration of political society affects both 'the scale and significance of rent-seeking behaviour.'¹¹

Second, the experience of quantitative policy studies has helped to liberate political scientists from an excessive preoccupation with

8. Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*.

9. See, for instance, Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

10. John Harriss, 'Comparing Political Regimes across Indian States', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 November 2001.

11. Stuart Corbridge, Glynn Williams, Rene Veron, and Manoj Srivastava, 'Making Social Science Matter: How the Rural Poor See the State in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 June and 21 June 2003, p. 2561.

'problems of evidence'. The nature of information on political behaviour will *necessarily* vary from state to state. But this need not preclude the undertaking of sensitive comparisons. Commenting on interstate economic analysis, former finance secretary Montek Singh Ahluwalia noted that there are 'differences in methods of estimating the SDP [state domestic product] in different states', but argues that 'this should not deter us from using state level data for analysing state performance'.¹² Comparisons within India, he notes, are not necessarily any more problematic (and possibly much less so) than international comparisons: 'the national accounts data of developing countries are also not always fully comparable... this has not deterred development economists from comparing performance across developing countries and drawing lessons from inter-country variations'.¹³ The validity of inter-state (but still intra-country) comparisons based on data that is not fully consistent becomes even less of an issue when the focus is on processes rather than outcomes, as it mainly is in the political issues discussed in this book.

COMPARING POLITICS ACROSS INDIA'S STATES

The eight essays in this volume represent an attempt to engage with key puzzles that have emerged in the study of comparative politics generally, and India in particular. The relevance of the Indian case to the larger global context stems from the fact that India has been the most durable democracy in the developing world; any indication of its self-preserving mechanisms is automatically pertinent. India has itself been undergoing certain changes in its political profile that a book of two-state comparisons can illuminate—for instance: the regionalization of Indian party politics; the increased role of state governments in second-generation economic reforms (and the possibility that reforms will widen gaps between rich and poor states); the need for stronger local civil societies in order to resist the potential ill effects of globalization. These issues have made understanding state-level politics more urgent. This volume, by design, places state politics in a broader comparative perspective.

12. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, 'Economic Performance of States in Post-Reforms Period', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6 May 2000, p. 1637.

13. *Ibid.*

Though the book's methodological purpose is to demonstrate the variety of uses for a particular analytical device (the use of intra-national comparative case studies), the puzzles themselves have been drawn from four key aspects of democratic practice:

- (i) Economic Policymaking
- (ii) Subaltern Politicization
- (iii) Civic Engagement
- (iv) Political Leadership

Two chapters are devoted to each of these thematic areas, though the conceptual frameworks and discursive styles used by the authors vary, intentionally, within each pair.

Clearly, these four aspects do not exhaust the full range of activities undertaken within democratic systems. The coverage *within* each of these areas is also not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, the objective is to convey at least some sense of the sheer diversity of approaches that the comparative method makes available, and the range of empirical and conceptual issues with which students of Indian democracy are engaging.

The relevance of each of the four dimensions of democratic politics is briefly introduced at the beginning of its corresponding section below, followed by a summary of the key findings of each of the contributions to this volume. This chapter concludes with a set of observations concerning both substantive and methodological issues that cut across the individual comparative studies, and indeed the sections into which they have been grouped.

Economic Policymaking

The politics of India's decade-old programme of economic reform is an area of study that has lacked an inter-state comparative-case framework. The existing literature has not been unaware of the importance of the state level in managing the politics of economic reform.¹⁴ There have been many studies of individual states, as well as the role of the federal system generally (as an institutional feature

14. See, for instance, Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, 'The Iconization of Chandrababu: Sharing Sovereignty in India's Federal Market Economy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5 May 2001.

of Indian democracy) in undercutting political resistance to economic policy change during the 1990s.¹⁵

However, researchers have not, in general, taken advantage of the laboratory furnished by India's federal democracy to test the extent to which the findings from these studies were valid. For instance, Jenkins's 1999 book places great emphasis on the role of democratic institutions in facilitating 'reform by stealth'. While sensitive to the existence of state-wise variation in the willingness of state-level political leaders to openly embrace reform or to proceed on their reformist agendas quietly, Jenkins did not attempt to explain the reasons for these variations.

Kennedy's chapter on Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu *does* address this issue, using detailed inter-state comparative analysis. Kennedy begins by documenting the differing responses of these two states to the policy autonomy that the central government's liberalization programme unleashed during the 1990s. Successive governments in Tamil Nadu—including periods of rule by each of the state's two dominant political parties—have consistently pursued a relatively understated approach to attracting the investment now theoretically within the grasp of any state able to compete for it. Tamil Nadu's governments played down the radical implications of their reform agendas, and certainly did not consider economic liberalization part of a winning electoral campaign strategy.

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which has ruled Andhra Pradesh since the mid-1990s, has taken the opposite approach. Andhra Pradesh's chief minister is among the loudest 'trumpeters' of economic reform among India's state-level leaders, identifying himself publicly with liberalization wherever possible. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu not only celebrates his market-oriented policy agenda at every opportunity, but also claims to have rooted the state's economic reforms in a set of supporting governance reforms. The Andhra Pradesh government has positioned itself as the driving force behind what it calls—rather unstealthily—a project of social transformation. Two similar-seeming states, in the same region—such different approaches. Why?

Kennedy's answer relies mainly on two explanatory factors: the degree of fragmentation in the two states' party systems; and the

15. Rob Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

extent of political mobilization among Dalits and other traditionally low-status castes. The existence of high-levels of both party fragmentation and subaltern political assertiveness has restrained governments of all political hues in Tamil Nadu from actively promoting a vision for the role of markets and economic reforms in the state's political destiny. This is because under conditions of great fluidity, such as prevail in highly fragmented party systems, reform decisions threaten to destabilize governing coalitions, and because the political rhetoric of lower-caste groups equates liberalization with an elite-biased agenda, an association that any government facing re-election would like to avoid. The result has been an understated approach to reform. Where Andhra Pradesh trumpets its reformist credentials—often more than is justified by its achievements, in fact—Tamil Nadu's political profile on issues of economic policy change is muted, in effect concealing many of the quite radical reforms that have been ushered in by the state government since 1991.

Kennedy's explanatory framework calls into question the validity of two existing theoretical models. The first contends that poorer states are less likely than richer ones to launch active, politicized reformist projects—not only because these can be seen as pro-rich by a rural grassroots electorate, but also because governments of underdeveloped states often anticipate little chance of success in competing for inward investment. Their biggest fear, according to this theory, is that market-oriented reforms will imply a scaling back of the centrally managed system of cross-regional subsidization by richer states. Given that Andhra Pradesh lags behind Tamil Nadu on most developmental indicators, its government's greater desire for conspicuous political association with market-oriented reform is thus surprising.

The facts of the AP-TN comparison *are*, however, consistent with the second theory with which Kennedy engages: that underdeveloped states are *more* likely to launch high-profile campaigns, driven by a need to 'signal' to potential investors the sincerity of their reformist intentions. Extreme demonstrations of credible commitment to markets, according to this theory, are necessary to offset what these states lack by way of human, institutional, and physical infrastructure. Kennedy argues that this explanation, while logical, cannot bear all of the explanatory freight: it accounts for some, though not all, of the differences in approach between the governments of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. While signalling is important, the multiple

dimensions of this process must be appreciated. In particular, Kennedy reminds us that state governments transmit signals not only to *external* actors (investors from outside the state) about *economic* intent, but also to *internal* actors (social groups within the state) about *political* intent. Armed with this more nuanced understanding of the calculus and behaviour of political elites, Kennedy is able to identify a range of other factors—relating to party politics, social mobilization and electoral contestation—that help to shape the divergent approaches to the political positioning of reform taken by these two states, which otherwise have pursued very similar (often identical) policies.

Sinha's chapter on West Bengal and Gujarat also seeks to explain variation across states in terms of how they respond to the liberalized policy environment. But instead of examining the *process* of attracting investment, Sinha begins with differences in the *outcome* of competition for investment. The fact that industrially advanced Gujarat has received more inward investment than West Bengal is not surprising; that it has received more than twelve *times* the investment is, however, difficult to explain in light of the policy convergence between the two states since the mid-1990s, when not radically dissimilar investment-promotion packages were introduced. Neither differentials in resource/infrastructure endowments nor the ideological baggage of the ruling leftist coalition in West Bengal appear sufficient to account for the two states' hugely divergent investment-attraction performances.

Sinha's explanation for the divergence is the differing 'institutional and political capacities' possessed by Gujarat and West Bengal. In particular, the investment-promotion bureaucracy in Gujarat is vastly better institutionalized, and rooted in a political system that is able to support its activities instead of thwarting them. The argument stresses the variation across the two states in terms of the interplay between ideas, interests, and institutions—an innovative use of a familiar analytical framework.

The explanatory power of Sinha's findings is increased by the extent to which the comparison is constructed against the grain of the 'stability thesis', or the idea that political stability helps to overcome other disadvantages in the competition to attract investment. West Bengal has been a paragon of political stability, while Gujarat has for at least twenty years been a cauldron of political discontent, manifested in various bouts of caste and communal conflict, high government turnover, and persistent factionalism in the state's successive ruling parties. And yet West Bengal has been the worse performer. If

the pair of cases had been stability-thesis-affirming in character, then the explanatory power of the ideas/interests/institutions framework would have been less convincing.

As it turns out, Sinha is able to examine not only the institutional strength of Gujarat's formidable investment-promotion bureaucracy, and the corresponding weakness of its counterpart in West Bengal, but also the importance of two other key variables. The first is the spatial distribution of industrial development. Where industrialization is less concentrated in urban areas, as it is in Gujarat, the potential constituency for reform—or at least the one perceived by politicians as most likely to emerge to support their political gamble on liberalization—moves beyond just city-dwellers and residents of urban districts generally. This pattern of economic development, in which the urban-rural divide does not map directly onto the industrial-agricultural dichotomy, also affects the way in which disaffected elements within a state-level ruling party—especially one that is committed to reform—go about seeking to build opposition to the state government's policy decisions. This is the second variable that Sinha examines in her comparative analysis of Gujarat and West Bengal. The result is a nuanced understanding of the way in which the real-world politics of ideological mobilization and the nitty-gritty of bureaucratic procedures combine to shape policy outcomes.

Subaltern Politicization

The rise of socially marginalized groups in party and electoral arenas has transformed the landscape of Indian politics. The political assertiveness of these groups has been on the increase since at least the early 1970s, but received a huge boost when in 1990 the central government agreed to increase quotas in central government employment for members of Other Backward Classes, or OBCs, people who belong neither to the 'twice born' elite castes nor to the untouchable groups at the bottom of the ritual hierarchy. In the 1990s parties formed around the assertion of subaltern political identities, and specifically committed to the 'upliftment of the weaker sections of society', took power in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and became a significant, though erratic, political force in Madhya Pradesh. In all three states the established national parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), reacted to these developments by seeking to broaden the social composition of their party hierarchies.

Kumar's chapter on Bihar and Orissa moves beyond the familiar similarities between these two states, which are often grouped together in analyses of Indian politics because both are poor and located in the east of the country. Bihar and Orissa also share a history of effervescent socialist politics, manifested in sustained support over the past quarter century for the various centre-left Janata political formations. During the latter part of the 1990s, the Janata Dal effectively 'regionalized' itself in both states, with the party's Bihar unit breaking away to become the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Orissa unit styling itself the Biju Janata Dal (BJD). Similar in many ways because of their shared parentage, these two parties nevertheless represent completely different social groups. Using detailed data from India's most sophisticated election surveys, Kumar documents the degree to which Bihar's RJD represents mainly OBCs (with members of the Yadav caste-cluster looming particularly large), while Orissa's BJD relies to a much greater extent on the support of a higher-status caste clientele.

Kumar then proceeds to show why this might be the case. Analysts convinced of the determinacy of social demography would point to Orissa's lack of a numerically preponderant OBC caste—like Bihar's Yadavs—to explain the relative weakness of the state's OBC movement. And yet Kumar shows that there are OBC groups in Orissa of almost exactly the same size as those found in Bihar. Orissa is also a more compact state, so the lack of barriers to collective action should have made it a *more* likely state to experience the type of OBC dominance that Bihar has witnessed. In examining this puzzle, Kumar demonstrates the importance of what might be called *political geography*. Politics in Orissa is built around regional groupings. These result not simply from the nature of the caste distribution—though this is a key variable in any such analysis—but also from the pattern of political mobilization in the state. The divergent history of social and political movements varies not only across the two states, but also between regions *within* at least one of the states—Orissa.

Kumar analyses the significance of these movements, and (crucially) some of their economic implications, particularly the impact of land reform on different social groups in the two states. The extent to which patterns of land ownership correspond with changes in social status—whether these are the result of 'reservations' for lower castes in government employment, or through other, less state-directed avenues of social mobility—helps to influence the likelihood of

certain political alliances forming. These, Kumar argues, are the key to understanding the divergent social bases of the Janata Dal's offspring in Orissa and Bihar. While careful to avoid lapsing into economic determinism, Kumar nicely illustrates the way in which the historical unfolding of social movements can have implications for subsequent political developments.

Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel's chapter on Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh assesses two states that reside, in terms of the salience of lower-caste mobilization in their politics, on either side of Kumar's case of Bihar. UP is a case in which subaltern political awakening, and its expression in the form of durable parties committed to representing these groups, has been perhaps even more pronounced than in Bihar. Madhya Pradesh, on the other hand, has not witnessed the rise of *bahujan* politics to anywhere near the same levels. The BSP has performed well (if erratically) in elections for the state assembly and parliament, but no identifiable vehicle to channel the aspirations of Madhya Pradesh's OBCs has emerged.

But, interestingly, this difference between the two states was not paralleled by the representational strategies adopted by the main national parties. The authors use statistical data on the caste profile of state legislators and party officials to demonstrate the way in which the Congress and the BJP each clung to a particular strategy for accommodating subaltern assertiveness, *regardless* of the seeming differences between the two states.

While the upper-caste-dominated BJP sought in both MP and UP to court fragments of the backward castes as a way of undermining the emergence of a broad backward-caste political movement, the Congress relied to a much greater degree on a 'coalition of the extremes' strategy, adding mainly tribal or Dalit support to its upper-caste base. While this is a significant finding in its own right, vindicating the use of closely paired comparative cases, Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel have also provided strong evidence to support their claims for why this pattern was so persistent for each party, despite the different state-level political contexts. The analysis is rooted in an understanding of both the political histories of these two states—most notably the relative dearth of certain types of political movements in Madhya Pradesh—and the incentives facing key political actors. This chapter is striking because, like Kumar's analysis of Orissa and Bihar, it situates these historic shifts in the social profile of India's parties within a keen understanding of how politics is played by its leading operatives. It

explores the means by which party leaders reconcile strategies for expanding their electoral bases with the tactics they deploy in order to combat rivals within their own parties.

Civic Engagement

Because of the starring role devised for civil society in aid programmes designed to consolidate fledgling democracies in the developing world, the case of India has always loomed large in this literature. Some theorists see India, the developing world's longest-lasting democracy, as clear evidence of the ability of civil society to assist democratic practices in taking root and, ultimately, to check the power of the state. Others see civil society in India as an arena through which privileged interests further entrench their dominance—through, for instance, the press and 'independent' associations controlled by social and political elites—while using the state to undermine the viability of associations organized by less privileged groups. Each of the two chapters in this section of the volume steps back from this stark choice. Actually existing civil society organizations reveal themselves in each chapter as, simultaneously, models of civic engagement and decidedly *un-civil*, capable of contributing to better governance but also, under certain circumstances, vulnerable to manipulation by elites.

Varshney's chapter on Kerala and Uttar Pradesh addresses the question of why UP should have suffered so much Hindu-Muslim violence, compared to Kerala, which during the early part of the twentieth century had been a communal tinderbox. The conventional wisdom has interpreted the statistical correlation between state-wide levels of illiteracy and the propensity towards communal rioting as a causal relationship. Fewer illiterates in Kerala, in other words, means fewer chances to manipulate communal passions through rumour and misinformation, spread by word of mouth throughout each community. Some variants of this explanation are based on a slightly broader array of variables, including not just literacy, but also health status or even such intangibles as the existence of cadre-based political mobilization among the progressive left.

Varshney observes that no less an authority than Amartya Sen has advanced this line of argument as part of his larger campaign to demonstrate the benefits of 'human development', an approach that not only looks beyond mere income-poverty, but also stresses the relationship between various types of 'capabilities'. Labelling this a

modernist understanding of the causes of Hindu-Muslim rioting, Varshney does not dispute the correlation between social development and communal violence indicators at the state level. But his analysis suggests that states are the *wrong unit of analysis* for this particular problem.

Varshney's analysis provides an excellent example of the complexities of applying the comparative method. Communal violence, he argues, is a local (primarily urban) phenomenon, and when data on social development and communal violence are aggregated at the city or town level, the correlation disappears. What *does* correlate, inversely, with lower levels of communal violence is the degree of local civil society organizing along Hindu-Muslim lines—that is, the existence of inter-communal associations that can act as an unofficial but semi-formalized institution for defusing disputes and preventing escalation into full-scale rioting. Varshney's further point is that examination of inter-state differences does not do away with the obligation for researchers to seek out, and probe the causes of, variation *within* states.

Having relocated the unit of analysis to the city level, Varshney is then able to address what is, in effect, the opposite argument to that put forward by Sen. Varshney labels this the 'anti-modernist' position. This critique argues that processes of modernization, most notably urbanization, are the primary cause of communal violence. The rootlessness of metropolitan existence, the insecurity of employment in the modern sector, the scope for manipulation of group identities offered to elites operating within urban settings—these are what spark Hindu-Muslim riots. Varshney's response is that if the anti-modernists were correct, then all cities would be prone to violence, when in fact the data indicates quite clearly a great deal of variation. Not all cities are equally riot-prone—indeed many are notably peaceful. Moreover, the data do not indicate a clear correlation between, on the one hand, variables that could be considered indicators of rootless modernity, and on the other, a city's riot-proneness.

Jenkins's chapter on Maharashtra and Rajasthan arrives at similar conclusions to Varshney concerning the unit-of-analysis question, but by way of a different route. The chapter asks whether any characteristics shared by these two states—in terms of socio-economic development, the pattern of party competition, or any other relevant variable—could account for the fact that these are the only two Indian states to have produced sustained, broad-based, and politicized-but-non-partisan anti-corruption movements. The answer is that

state-wide variables *cannot* in fact explain why these movements, which share a striking number of features that set them apart from other such movements, should have emerged in Rajasthan and Maharashtra and nowhere else in India.

Jenkins argues that far more relevant explanatory factors are to be found by examining the nature of the regions (*within* their respective states) where these two movements are based. Two similarities in the home regions of these movements are examined in particular: the demographic weight of the dominant caste group, and the nature of corruption. The latter variable focuses on the methods used by officials to obtain illicit income from public works projects. The analysis highlights the extent to which existing theoretical frameworks discount the ability of officials to choose among different ways of structuring corrupt transactions, and in particular the effects these choices have on the poor.

While locality-specific, as opposed to state-wide, factors are found to account for the emergence of such strikingly similar movements in these two very different states, it turns out that state-level variables are important in explaining the divergence between these two movements that began to manifest itself as the 1990s came to a close. The very different civil societies and political cultures in Rajasthan and Maharashtra ultimately produced fairly distinct state responses to efforts by anti-corruption activists to institutionalize participatory monitoring of government decision-making.

Political Leadership

The issue of political leadership has taken on greater salience in recent years for a number of reasons, three of which are suggested by trends identified in three previous sections. First, the ability to *balance economic policy considerations against political survival* has become an increasingly valuable leadership asset in recent years in India. Second, the *changing social composition of the political elite* has produced in some cases a new idiom for the exercise of political leadership, and a change in the nature of political representation. And, third, it is clear that one of the major challenges facing India, and indeed a great number of even newer developing country democracies, is the need to maintain *civil society's poised state*—that is, its ability to influence politics without becoming subsumed within intractable political conflict, of either the partisan or identity-based variety.

Manor's chapter on Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh probes the historical and sociological data on these two states to uncover deeper social-structural reasons for the similarities between them in terms of parties, party systems, and electoral dynamics. Interestingly, he finds none. Manor argues that the imperatives of coalition building at the national level is a much more important influence on the pattern of party and electoral politics in Andhra and Karnataka, accounting in particular for the recent divergence in the fortunes of political leaderships in the two states.

The remarkable period of parallel party alternation across the two states—that is, when Congress won or lost elections in either state, it tended to do so in the other too—came to an end in 1999, when Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was able to win re-election against a Congress opposition, while his counterpart in Karnataka (who like Naidu led a centre-left regional party) could not. Manor emphasizes the role of political leadership, drawing on a diverse array of empirical material to demonstrate how differing 'modes of political management' between leaders in the two states can help to account for their different electoral fates. But as Manor points out, this divergence came at precisely the moment when the two states had finally begun to look more alike in terms of patterns of socio-economic development. Andhra Pradesh during the 1990s, for instance, started to develop a more diversified economy, and had success in combating illiteracy—not to Karnataka levels in either case, but closing the gap. This discrepancy helps to highlight the relative autonomy of high politics—the realm of political leadership expressed through party ideology and partisan competition—from the changing socio-economic reality on the ground.

The comparison between Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka also allows Manor to examine the variety of means by which political leaders go about reconciling two distinct types of governance challenges: governance within their parties, and the relationship between the state and social groups. Both states have in fact thrown up examples of leaders who, by seeking to centralize decision-making have in fact ended up losing not only control of their parties, but also their grip over the instruments of state power. But the comparison also highlights the danger of the opposite strategy: seeking to satisfy too large a variety of social groups (by, for instance, distributing posts to representatives of different communities) can end up both crippling a state government's capacity for concerted action, and building

a base of electoral support that is impressively wide but lacking in depth.

Banerjee's chapter on West Bengal and Tamil Nadu tackles the issue of political leadership head on—examining two leaders, both women, from these two very different states. J. Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu and Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal are both figures of some national standing, mainly by virtue of the increasing importance of even small regional parties to the construction of parliamentary majorities and the formation of coalition governments in New Delhi. While neither is primarily a 'women's leader' in terms of the issues they highlight or the organized constituencies they represent, their female-ness remains in both cases a salient feature in the male-dominated world of party politics, and tends to be as much remarked upon as their regional identifications.

Banerjee's paper highlights the *inter-relation* between these two facets of the leaders' political personas—their gender and regional identities. In particular, she demonstrates that the means by which Jayalalithaa and Mamata enacted their female political roles was in both cases shaped by regional context, including social attitudes, electoral dynamics, and institutional legacies. But the influence of state-level factors on things like the leaders' relationship to femininity is tempered by the impact of the women's social position. Mamata's grassroots image embodied one narrative about women's place in politics, while Jayalalithaa's glamorous (but socially stigmatized) past as a film heroine impelled her towards a different persona altogether. Both are familiar options in the repertoire of political strategies available to women political leaders. Which one is adopted may have more to do with social position than with state-level factors, though how they are played out can be significantly affected by the shape of the regional political universe.

The Jayalalithaa-Mamata comparison also highlights the ability of similar modes of political leadership to assume different guises under different leaders. Both women can be said to practise populist politics, their programmatic priorities designed to appeal to a mass audience by forging a personal bond with a dispersed electorate. But both the style and content of populism differ markedly across these two cases. While Mamata revels in her earthiness, claiming an affinity with the people, Jayalalithaa pursues an 'elitist' form of populism—a contradiction in terms that she uses a variety of discursive strategies to elide. From this comparative perspective, populism appears inevitably rooted in regional culture.

COMPARING COMPARISONS

Beyond the thematic commonalities within each section of the volume, a number of insights emerge if we examine patterns across the book's four parts—that is, if we compare the comparisons. These are mainly of three types: those relating to regional issues, those that concern substantive matters of theoretical significance, and those that illuminate methodological questions.

Regional Issues

Four states (Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh) are covered in more than one two-state dyad. This furnishes an excellent opportunity to appreciate the extent to which a comparative framework can bring into relief certain facets of a state that would be obscured if it were treated on its own. The versions of Andhra Pradesh conveyed in the chapters by Manor and Kennedy, for instance, do not come into direct conflict, especially as the former is more concerned with the substance of reform, and the latter with its political packaging. But viewed alongside one another the two studies reveal contrasting ways of looking at the importance of party systems in the two states: Manor makes a case for electoral dynamics and party contestation existing on a slightly different (though not unattached) level of politics from either economic realities or the politics of social transformation, while Kennedy can chart more or less direct impacts from partisan behaviour to political practice.

The two different takes on UP found in this volume provide a richly nuanced portrait of this central force in India's politics. UP can seem increasingly normless when contrasted with the political civility that still prevails in Kerala—though Varshney's chapter, as we have seen, emphasizes the importance of local rather than state-level variables. And yet, when the process of political awakening in UP analysed by Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel is compared with the far less advanced stage of Mandalization achieved in Madhya Pradesh, it becomes possible to appreciate the significance of what is taking place in India's largest state, poised as it is at the vanguard of north India's social transformation. Indeed, the very intensity of the social churning and political fragmentation that is taking place in UP raises questions about the role of state governments in fomenting the communal conflicts that Varshney is describing: even though Varshney makes a convincing

case for the role of local factors in explaining the propensity towards communal violence, one cannot help wondering whether, as he indicates in his critique of the anti-modernists, there is something about the revolutionary quality of the democratic upsurge represented by lower-caste assertiveness that is at least partly responsible for the force of conflict which local civil societies must steel themselves to endure.

The complexities of Tamil Nadu's politics are revealed in both Banerjee's account of flamboyant political leadership and the staid world of economic policy reviewed by Kennedy. But different meanings of the idea of populism can be found in these two accounts. In Banerjee's version, populism emerges as part of an entrenched ethic of noblesse oblige. For Kennedy, however, populism in Tamil Nadu is one of the means through which downtrodden social groups get mobilized. The two visions are not contradictory. In fact, the seeming tension between these two accounts of populism helps to underscore an important point concerning the nature of political change: what begins as the acceptance of charity can mutate into demands for the recognition of rights and dignity. Rather than representing a contradiction, these two accounts of populism in Tamil Nadu illustrate the importance of both the analytical context—which for Kennedy concerns the justification of policy reform, and for Banerjee the construction of a leader's persona—and the nature of the comparator: paired with West Bengal, Tamil Nadu's politics can seem rather alien; when bracketed with Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu appears far less politically exotic.

West Bengal, the last of the four states represented in more than one chapter, comes across differently in the chapters by Sinha and Banerjee. Contrasting West Bengal with the industrial dynamism of Gujarat, Sinha is naturally drawn to the impacts of a Marxist ideology on various aspects of economic performance. Banerjee, on the other hand, because the axis of her comparison (with Tamil Nadu) concerns the cultural politics of women's political leadership, is drawn into a discussion of Bengali culture, which casts West Bengal in a different light, though the sense of a serious public culture remains a consistent theme running through both chapters.

Substantive Matters of Theoretical Significance

Certain matters of relevance to theory-building in the study of political development crop up repeatedly throughout the book. These

fall into four main categories: the complexities of federal politics, the building blocks of political economy, the interaction between caste and region, and the importance of political style.

Though addressing a crucial issue, studies of 'centre-state relations' can veer towards the dull and plodding. The contributors to this volume who deal with this topic, however, manage to sidestep the sometimes tedious preoccupations of that portion of the federalism literature that is dominated by students of public administration, while still raising important questions about the nature of federal politics. Both Manor and Jaffrelot, for instance, address the impact of coalition politics at the national level—involving as it does regional parties in key roles—on the politics of individual states and the strategies deployed by key leaders. Manor, in effect, examines the mirror image of the regionalization of national politics: the nationalization of regional politics. While changes in the balance of forces within individual states increasingly have implications for political alignments in Delhi, the cases of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are clear examples of the way in which the calculations of a party's high command in Delhi can affect the contours of state politics: had the BJP national executive not forced the party's Karnataka unit into an ill-advised alliance with a section of the state's Janata Dal in 1999, the outcome of that year's assembly election might well have been different; but it was seats in the national parliament that concerned party strategists at BJP headquarters in Delhi. This theme is echoed in the chapters by Kumar, Kennedy, and Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel.

Issues of political economy appear not only in Part I of the book, which focuses on policymaking, but elsewhere as well. Jenkins, for instance, analyses the way in which the incentives created by certain types of corrupt transaction affect the willingness and capacity of civil society organizations to mobilize people to demand accountability. But Jenkins's characterization of the associations that are the subject of his chapter as 'movement groups' raises the question of how best to classify ambiguous expressions of civil society. This is an issue to which a number of other contributors return—most notably Varshney, who draws (implicitly) on the distinction between the bridging and bonding forms of social capital. Sinha's exploration of the political dynamics of reform uses economic associations as its main point of reference, but the analysis is sensitive to the role played by political groups whose identity may be unclear in interest-based terms, but which have been a key influence on efforts to derail economic reform

in West Bengal. Sinha's approach advocates a blurring of the lines separating the conventional categories of ideas, interests and institutions. Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel, seeking a means for describing some of the changes wrought by Mandalization (and efforts by political parties to capitalize on it), argue that the potential for reservations, combined with outrage at the resistance displayed by upper castes, turned the OBCs into an 'interest group', a term which, in this context, appears to resemble the Rudolphs' 'demand group'—something of a hybrid category denoting a movement which draws on traditional identities, but for purposes of advancement through modern politics.¹⁶ More familiar aspects of political economy, such as analysis of the political implications of landholding patterns, are found in the chapters by Manor and Kumar. Kumar traces the impact of both the Green Revolution and land reform on patterns of caste mobilization in Bihar and Orissa, demonstrating the growing tendency for issues of economic change to be studied alongside those of political change, though in ways that an earlier generation of scholars, steeped in Marxist categories of analysis, might not fully recognize.

As for the issue of region and caste, how the rise of regional identity in politics has been promoted rather than supplanted by caste politics is a theme explored by a number of contributors whose chapters are not to be found in Part II of the book, on the political assertion of the lower castes. Both Banerjee and Kennedy, for instance, employ an analysis of caste's political significance in their respective treatments of Tamil Nadu's politics. Banerjee, in fact, though her chapter is not primarily concerned with the politics of caste, ends up echoing the theoretical framework used by Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel in their analysis of Madhya Pradesh's adaptation to Mandal politics. Tamil Nadu politics, according to Banerjee's reading of Harriss (someone, as we saw earlier, who has taken seriously the need to engage in inter-state comparative work), contains its own version of the coalition of extremes. Banerjee even quotes one analyst who described the AIADMK's construction of its electoral base as a process

16. For a discussion of demand groups, see Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoebler Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). For a discussion of the hybrid nature of much of India's civil society, see Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoebler Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

of the 'have-a-lots allying with have-nothings against the have-a-littles'. The parallel with Digvijay Singh's strategy in Madhya Pradesh is obvious. But whereas Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel focus on what motivated this political strategy, and the differing forms it has taken, Banerjee is concerned with the overtones implied by the AIADMK's discourse. In Tamil Nadu, benefits are delivered to the have-nots in the form of charity, not as something to which the poor possess an automatic entitlement. The contrast with Madhya Pradesh, a much poorer state on aggregate than Tamil Nadu, is thus all the more striking: the machinations of even a seasoned politician like Digvijay Singh involve appeals to sentiments of rights and social empowerment. The chapters by Manor and Jenkins view certain similarities in caste profiles as important explanatory variables, though with respect to very different questions: Manor looks at similarities between Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka as a way of understanding the constraints facing political leaders in these two states, whereas Jenkins examines the parallel caste configurations in two *sub*-state regions—one in Maharashtra and one in Rajasthan—in order to understand its implications for the efficacy of anti-corruption activism.

The final area of theoretical interest is that of political style. Several dimensions of political style emerge in the comparative studies contained in this volume. The tendency for a certain brand of Indian politics to involve demonstrations or embodiments of personal sacrifice is found in the chapters by Banerjee and Jenkins. Banerjee notes that 'Mamata (whose name means "maternal love") is universally known as Didi, the archetype of the sacrificing and caring older sister in the Bengali imagination'. This is part of the political persona that Mamata has constructed. And while Mamata takes part in the mainstream of party politics, the echo of this style of politics can be found in the work of both of the movement groups studied by Jenkins, who describes them as operating within what W. H. Morris-Jones once called 'the saintly idiom of politics'. Saintly politics—which appeals to norms of public morality—works only where some modicum of political civility exists. This, in turn, is reflected in modes of governance that are accommodative in nature. Jenkins sees accommodative governance as severely lacking when corruption takes an exclusionary form, as it has in the regions where the two movements he studied are based. Accommodative governance as a political style is also a theme in the chapter by Manor, who argues that the tradition of political accommodation is much stronger in Karnataka than in

Andhra Pradesh. This helps to explain the relative absence of secessionist movements in Karnataka, whereas the Telengana movement in Andhra Pradesh has long been a source of political conflict.

Methodological Questions

The contributions to this volume illustrate the large array of methods that can be employed within the context of a two-state comparison. Half of the chapters—those by Varshney, Kumar, Sinha and Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel—rely heavily on quantitative data, either to establish a pattern that requires explaining, or else to measure an indicator that is to be used in accounting for a given phenomenon. In two cases—the chapters by Varshney and Sinha—quantitative indicators are used for both purposes. But it is worth noting that in all chapters, at least some quantitative information is used, and that even in those most heavily reliant on quantitative data, a substantial degree of qualitative information is subjected to an interpretive framework.

A number of methodological questions appear in more than one chapter. Manor, Jenkins, Banerjee and Varshney, for example, contend with the unit-of-analysis issue—combining an inter-state focus with appreciation of the multiple levels of aggregation at which causality takes place, and the speed with which the relevant level can shift. Manor draws attention to the historical differences between the major regions within Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, especially between those that were under British rule and those that prior to Independence were subjects of one of India's princes. Jenkins looks at the district level and slightly above for relevant facts that might help to explain Rajasthan's unlikely pairing with Maharashtra in terms of the politics of anti-corruption. Kumar's explanation for the different political support bases of state-level descendants of the Janata Dal in Orissa and Bihar pays close attention to the differences between sub-state regions within Orissa. Varshney's analysis of UP and Kerala not only moves to the local level, but to urban India, and with strong empirical reason: communal rioting in India is almost entirely an urban affair—the first clue that it is the structure of civic life that will prove critical in determining a city's propensity to suffer communal riots. Banerjee's analysis of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu is less preoccupied with geographic scale, and more concerned with conventional notions of social status. This, for instance, is central to her analysis of the West Bengal case, where much attention is paid to the

reactions of the *bhadralok* to Mamata's particular brand of firebrand politics. Because the *bhadralok* cannot be conceived without Kolkata, the chapter brings us, indirectly but inevitably, back to a local level of analysis.

In terms of the research design and selection of cases, a range of different strategies are represented in the volume. For instance, both Jenkins's chapter on Maharashtra and Rajasthan and Jaffrelot and Zérinini-Brotel's chapter on UP and Madhya Pradesh build their analyses around the way in which rather different states can end up producing roughly similar outcomes, though both chapters highlight the differences that lie beneath the surface. The chapters by Kennedy and Sinha each examines a pair of cases that is subjected to a common externally imposed shock: the shift in India's policy framework from a variety of state socialism to a far more market-oriented approach to economic policy. This allows their analyses to examine how this shock was dealt with differently by different states, and then to develop an explanation for these differences. Both Jenkins and Manor employ analytical devices that allow them to account for both patterns of similarity across states, and subsequent divergences.

Apart from formal issues of research design and methodology, the chapters also highlight the importance of different approaches to political analysis, even where the authors are not from opposing methodological camps as such. Examining the dynamics of party organization, Banerjee argues that when assessed 'against the usual academic parameters for judging the efficacy and maturity of a political party, such as well-formed political ideology and economic policies, disciplined organization of cadres, coherence and depth of leadership, and links to clearly defined constituencies and interest groups, both the AIADMK and Trinamul seem deficient.' That Banerjee manages to find alternative ways of conveying the sense of what is significant about these two parties by focusing on less conventional conceptions of how power is represented and exercised within political organizations is a useful reminder of biases that can infect ostensibly neutral terms. But just as important is the fact that while Manor, in his study of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, *does* employ the 'usual academic parameters' listed by Banerjee, he does so in ways which recognizes that seemingly universal analytical categories are not always translatable across cultural boundaries, even when the boundary in question is one separating two otherwise fairly similar south Indian states.