

Democracy In Independent India and the Working of Political Institutions

We learnt in the previous chapter about the different institutions to govern and administer the country that have been described in the Indian constitution. What functions do these institutions perform and what is their relationship to each other? In this chapter we shall try and understand how democratic politics developed in India at the ground level after independence. How was the economic and foreign policy of the country formulated and how was it executed? What were the aspirations and needs of people living in different regions of India? What steps did the government take to fulfil these aspirations and needs? Let us try and analyse these initiatives of the government.

The Indian constitution sought to achieve several objectives simultaneously. They included making democracy effective and vibrant, bringing political unity to the country, and creating institutions to work for much-needed economic and social change. The challenge before the newly independent country was to develop these institutions and systems and ensure they worked effectively and rapidly. The people of India had to prove to the world that they could maintain the unity and integrity of the country after it gained independence while also working within a democratic framework to bring about economic and social change. We shall try to understand the democratic system that was introduced and developed in India after independence from the following events.

14.1 The first general elections in 1952

An important challenge before the country was to conduct the first general election according to the new constitution in order to ensure the success and stability of Indian democracy. Although our constitution was adopted in 1950, the first general election was conducted in 1952. It required intense preparations. Every adult Indian – men and women – had been conferred the right to vote for the first time. The first task was to prepare the electoral rolls listing the names of all eligible voters in the country. This was a monumental task, given the vastness of the country and the difficulty in reaching far-flung regions. The voters had to be educated about the electoral



Figure 14.1: Ballot boxes for each candidate at a polling booth. A voter looks for the box of his preferred candidate

process and persuaded to visit the polling booths to cast their vote. Also, polling booths had to be set up across the country and staffed by polling officers. Around 85 percent of the population was illiterate so how could they read and recognise the names of the candidates they wanted to vote for? The Election Commission came up with an innovative solution – each candidate was allotted an election symbol that was prominently displayed on the ballot box. Each candidate had a separate ballot box so the voters had to drop their voter's slip in the box of their preferred candidate.

What preparations did the government have to make to conduct the first general elections? Discuss in class with the help of the teacher.

In what way was the first general election different from the elections held today?

First general elections: some important facts

- The system of universal adult franchise was being used for the first time in the country to give all citizens the opportunity to vote.
- The government set up polling booths in far-flung rural areas to enable people to cast their vote.
- The elections to the legislative assemblies of all the states were held simultaneously with the elections to the Lok Sabha.
- A total of 17 crore voters were registered for the election, 85 percent of them illiterate.
- Around 2,24,000 polling booths were set up, with one polling booth for around every 1,000 voters. Ten lakh officials were deployed to oversee the polling process.

And some interesting incidents

- Separate polling booths were set up for women in regions where the majority of women observed the practice of *purdah*. Only women officials were deployed in these booths.
- A woman came to a polling booth in Ajmer in a horse-drawn carriage, covered from head to foot in velvet clothing, with only her finger exposed. It was a compulsory requirement to put the indelible ink mark on every voter's forefinger to show that they had cast their vote.
- Some villages voted as a single unit. According to one report, the people of an *adivasi* village in Assam travelled a full day to reach their polling booth. They spent the night dancing and singing around their camp fire. At sunrise, they went in procession, single file, to the polling booth to cast their vote.
- The people of another village decided who to vote for in a novel manner. They got two wrestlers to represent the two candidates in a wrestling match. They decided that all the voters in the village would cast their vote in favour of the candidate represented by the wrestler who won.

Is it a good democratic practice for a village to cast all its votes in favour of a particular candidate? Discuss in class.

Have you observed events similar to those that happened in the first general elections in any recent elections in your area? Discuss in class.

On the whole, the first general election was more successful than anyone expected. Around 40 percent of the voters on the electoral rolls cast their votes. Around 40 percent of the women voters also participated. There was negligible poll violence. The Congress party led by Jawaharlal Nehru won by a huge majority – 45 percent of the voters cast their vote in favour of the party, which won 74 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha. But the non-Congress parties also got wide support from the people, including the Communist Party of India, Socialist Party, Jan Sangh and several regional parties. Independent India thus took its first successful step towards multi-party democracy. The general elections that followed in 1957 and 1962 were also successful, with Indian democracy striking deep roots.

What percentage of the vote did the non-Congress parties win in the first general election?

What percentage of Lok Sabha members belonged to the non-Congress parties?

14.2 Dominance of a single party

The Indian National Congress was the dominant party in the first three elections after independence (1952, 1957, 1962) with no other party winning even 10 percent of the vote on its own. The Congress won over 70 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha in these elections even though it won only around 45 percent of the total votes cast. The party also formed the government in the majority of states. But although only a single party ruled at the centre and most of the states, other political ideologies also flourished. Even within the Congress party, there were many different streams of thought, with the

conflicts between these different groups only helping to strengthen inner party democracy.

Though other parties could not challenge the dominance of the Congress party, they helped establish a healthy tradition of democratic politics by contesting the polls. Their influence kept growing and, within a few decades, they began to pose a serious challenge to Congress dominance. Their growth, thus, strengthened the democratic system that was visualised in the constitution. That is the special significance of Indian democracy – its multi-party system thrived despite the pre-eminence of one party for nearly 20-25 years.

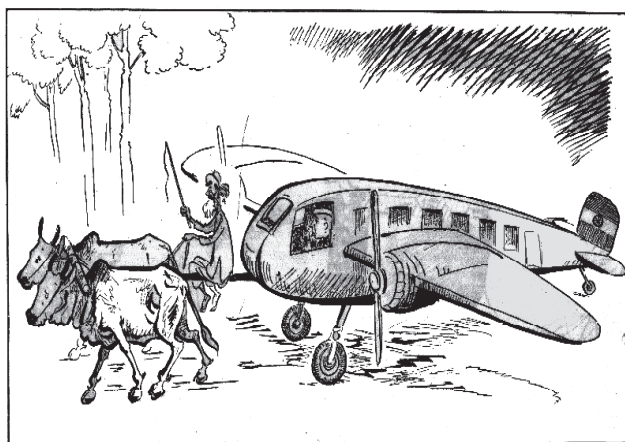


Figure 14.2: In the early years after independence, the election symbol of the Congress party was a pair of bullocks. What does this cartoon say about the party? (Shankar's Weekly, July 15, 1951)

What do you think were the conditions that led to the dominance of a single party in Indian politics from 1947 to 1967?

What are your views on the importance of a multi-party system in a democracy?

14.2.1 Abolition of the zamindari system (1949-56)

During British rule, the zamindari system prevailed over most regions of the country. The landowning class had different names in different regions – zamindar, malguzar, gauntiya, jagirdar etc. They collected

land taxes from the farmers on behalf of the government and they were regarded as owners of the land. They decided how much rent the farmers should pay and evicted those who could not pay. They dominated the villages, getting the villagers to work for them without payment (forced labour).

After independence, the first task facing the state governments was to abolish the zamindari system. Almost all the states enacted laws to abolish zamindari, eliminate forced labour, and re-distribute land among the landless. We saw in the previous chapter how the landowners put legal obstacles in the way of implementing these laws and how the constitution was amended for the first time to resolve the issue.

By 1956, the zamindari system was abolished across the country and the re-distribution of the land of the zamindars was well under way. Around 200 lakh peasant families were benefited, becoming owners of the land they tilled. They were mostly middle level farmers. Their living conditions definitely improved but the zamindari system could not be fully abolished, with many landowners using different tactics to retain control of their land. Also, the poor farmers and landless labour continued to be deprived of land.

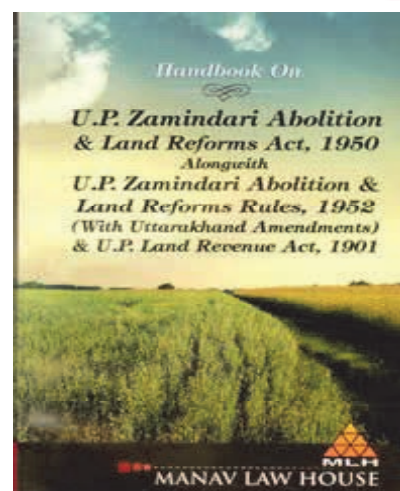


Figure 14.3: Uttar Pradesh was the first state to enact a law to abolish the zamindari system

At the time of gaining independence, it was felt that abolition of the zamindari system would be an important step for the country. What changes in society do you think this measure brought?

14.2.2 Hindu Code Bill 1952-56

Even before the first general elections, the constituent assembly had prepared a Hindu Code bill to ensure women's rights in Hindu society, eradicate casteism and simplify the laws governing the Hindu undivided family and property. Dr Ambedkar played a leading role in preparing the bill and presenting it to the constituent assembly. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru also favoured the bill but conservative Hindus strongly opposed it. So the constituent assembly decided to introduce the bill after the elections. Upset by the decision, Dr Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet. Let us try to understand the content of this bill that generated so much political controversy.



Figure 14.4: This cartoon published in 1951 depicts the mood of Indian women of that time. , , ,

During British rule, a common law for crime (robbery, murder etc), called the Criminal Code, was enacted and implemented across the country. But in most other aspects of social life, such as marriage, family, property, adoption etc, each religion had its own laws according to its beliefs and traditions.

Often, there were different legal practices even within the same religion. In most cases, the religion-specific laws were based on a patriarchal, male perspective, which meant that women were not given equal rights.

Hindu society saw many reform movements from as early as the 19th century that sought to give women equal rights and put an end to the caste system. The large numbers of women and so-called lower caste people who participated in the freedom movement also expected independent India to pass laws to improve their social conditions. The Hindu Code bill was prepared to meet these aspirations. It tried to unify the different laws that prevailed among different Hindu sects and visualised other important reforms of Hindu society. Its most important proposals included the following:

1. If the head of a family dies without leaving a will, then his wife and daughters will get an equal share of his property as the male heirs. Earlier, only sons were given a share in the property.
2. Marrying for a second time when the husband or wife is still alive is illegal. This rule earlier applied only to women.
3. Men and women have equal rights to demand a divorce in special circumstances.
4. Inter-caste marriages are legally permissible.
5. It is legal to adopt a child of any caste.

Conservative Hindus opposed these provisions, saying they violated the tenets of Hinduism and would lead to a breakdown of Hindu society. They included not just traditional parties like the Hindu Mahasabha and the Jan Sangh but also senior Congress leaders like Dr Rajendra Prasad. Opposing them were the reformist Hindus and women members of parliament, who said that the constitutional vision of a just and equitable society cannot be achieved without eradicating the caste system and giving women equal rights. The bill was a major poll issue in the 1952 elections and the Congress victory weakened its opponents. However, four separate laws were passed instead of a single law. Nevertheless, giving equal rights to women was a big step in social change in the country.

One argument that repeatedly came up during the debate on the Hindu Code bill was: Why should such a law be enacted only for Hindus and not for other religions? Dr Ambedkar and Nehru argued that other religions did not have strong reform movements like Hinduism, so their followers would oppose any reformed law for their religion or a unified civil code for the country. Also, the Indian Muslims were already worried about their religious freedom after the partition, so passing such a law for Muslims would only alienate them further. That is why the directive principles state that a common personal law for the entire country will be passed only when the right time comes.

If these four laws had not been passed, what impact would it have had on the condition of women?

What role can inter-caste marriages play in helping to break the caste system? Has this law affected the caste system in any way?

Do you think your brothers and sisters should receive an equal share in your family property?

14.2.3 Reorganisation of states and States Reorganisation Commission

The constitution declared that India would be a union of states, with each state having its own government. But the question was: On what basis should these states be formed?

The British had divided their Indian empire into administrative provinces – Madras (which included parts of present-day Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala) and Bombay (which included regions where people spoke Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada, Konkani and other languages). In addition, there were princely kingdoms whose subjects also spoke different languages – for example, the Nizam of Hyderabad's state where people spoke Urdu, Telugu, Marathi and Kannada.

A major demand during the freedom movement was that states should be organised on the basis of the dominant regional languages. At that time, people speaking the same language who lived in different provinces and princely states were demanding their own state.

In 1917, the Congress party announced that it would reorganise the states on a linguistic basis once the country gained independence. The party had already set up its regional units on a linguistic basis. But once India gained independence in 1947, the biggest concern was to maintain the unity of the country after the trauma of bifurcation on a religious basis. This concern was reflected by the Dhar Commission, set up by the constituent assembly in 1948 under the leadership of SK Dhar to look into the issue of linguistic states. The commission recommended that the issue should be postponed because setting up regional administrative units on a linguistic basis would only aggravate divisive tendencies and endanger national unity.

Nevertheless, people's movements were launched in many regions of the country demanding linguistic states, chief among them being the movements in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

In 1952, Telugu-speaking freedom fighter Potti Sriramulu undertook a fast unto death in support of the demand for a separate state of Andhra Pradesh. He died after 58 days of hunger strike. The news of his death led to largescale violence in all the Telugu-speaking regions, with many people killed in police firings. The government was forced to concede to the demand of the people and the new state of Andhra Pradesh was created in October 1953, with the remaining part of Madras province becoming a Tamil-language state. The success of the Andhra Pradesh movement spurred other groups to pursue their linguistic agenda with greater zeal.



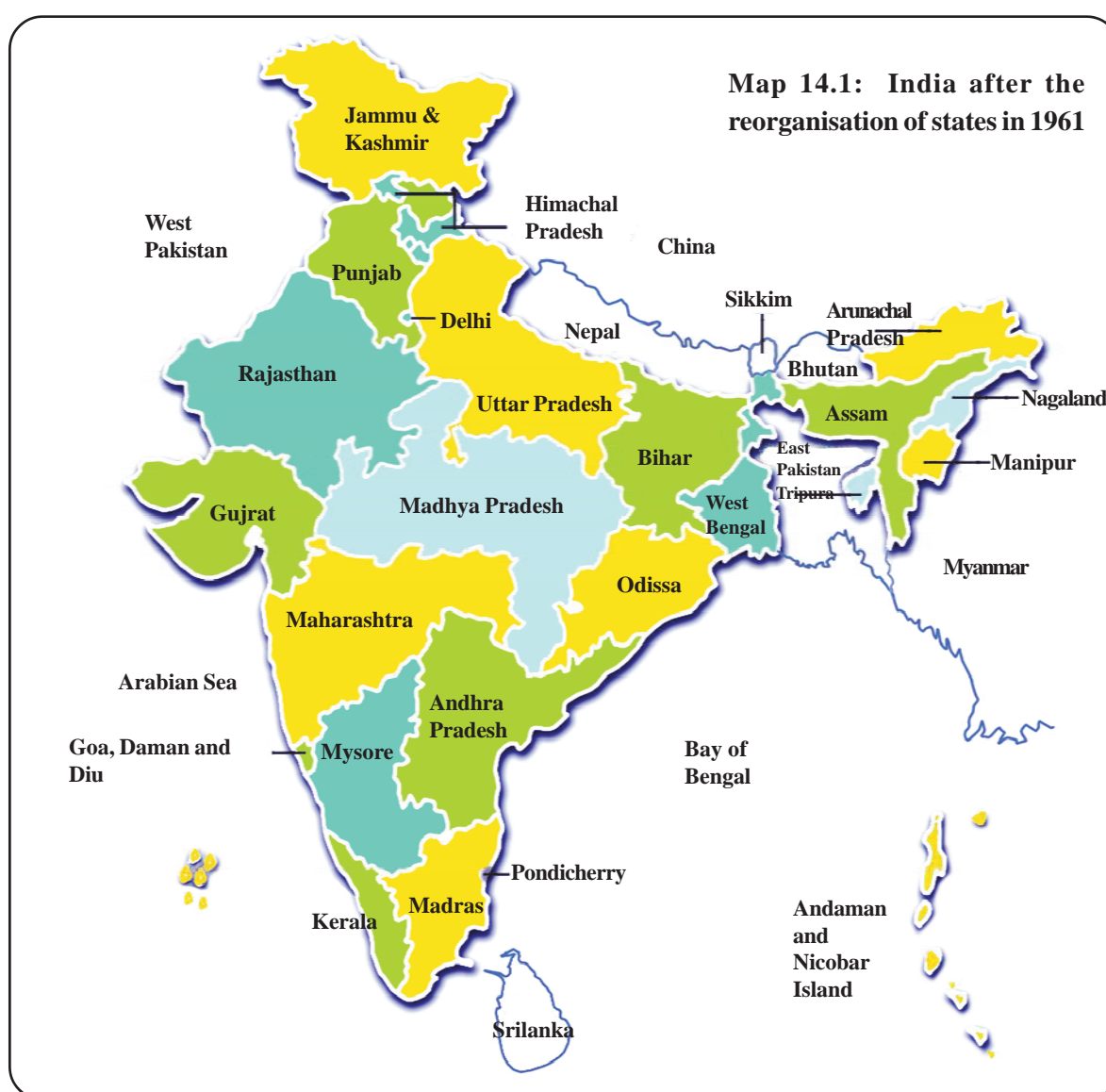
Figure 14.5: Potti Sriramulu

Reorganising states on a linguistic basis was not an easy task. In many regions, several languages were spoken, so it was difficult to demarcate where an area speaking one language ended and where an area speaking another language began. There was also the question of the status of a minority language in a linguistic state. In addition, cities like Madras (currently Chennai) and Bombay (currently Mumbai) had residents speaking many different languages and major investments made by industrialists from other regions. Which state should these cities belong to, or should they be created as separate city states?

That was not all. A large part of the country had so-called Hindi-speaking people who actually spoke Chhattisgarhi, Bundeli, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Haryanvi, Marwari and a host of other regional languages. Should each regional language area be carved out into a separate state? What should be done with *adivasi* regions like Jharkhand? These were all contentious questions that subsequently gave rise to many regional movements.

The government constituted a States Reorganisation Commission to look into all these demands and give its recommendations. The commission submitted its report in 1955. Its recommendations were broadly accepted and formed the basis for reorganising the states. So, eventually, the Indian states were created on a linguistic basis. Fortunately, the country did not break up after their formation, as many Congress leaders had feared. On the contrary, it strengthened national unity because, now, people speaking the same language found a place for themselves where they were respected and where their language and culture could be developed.

Imagine a situation where linguistic states had not been created. What would the map of India have looked like?



Map 14.1: The map of India after the reorganisation of states in 1961. Compare this map with a current map of Indian states and find out which states have changed their names and which new states have been created subsequently.

Do you personally agree with the idea of creating linguistic states? Give reasons for your answer. Also discuss with others in class and assess their views.

Is there any region in the country where only one language is spoken? If there are people speaking minority languages in every area, would they face discrimination in a linguistic state?

Doesn't the idea of linguistic states ignore *adivasi* languages? What do you think?

Many new states were created in India after 2000. What was the basis on which they were formed? Find out with the help of your teacher.

14.2.4 Planned development

Within two months of adopting the new constitution, a planning commission was set up to guide the country's economic development. Jawaharlal Nehru favoured planned development. He believed that the central government should take concrete steps to develop the country economically and socially. The Planning Commission proposed Five-Year Plans for economic development, opting for a mixed economy in which the public and private sectors would join hands to develop the country.

The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) focused on agricultural development, with large dams and irrigation canals being constructed and community development programmes being taken up in rural areas. However, for several reasons, agricultural growth remained below expected levels. One major reason was the slow pace of land reforms. Another was the lack of industries to manufacture farm implements, chemical fertilisers etc for agriculture and to absorb the rural unemployed.

In the Second Five Year Plan (1956-61), the focus shifted to industrialisation, with the government playing a leading role in developing heavy industry – iron and steel, machinery manufacture, mining, electricity, railways, transportation etc. The private sector was expected to develop small and medium industries. The planners believed that industrial development would help solve the problem of rural unemployment, with people migrating to cities to work in factories. Also, industrialisation would lead to the development of the services sector.

Planned development did help create a base for industrial development in India but it did not help in absorbing the unemployed or lowering poverty to the extent visualised in the plans. That is why a special programme was taken up in the decade of the 1970s to eradicate poverty and generate jobs. You will learn more about these initiatives in the economics chapters.

Thus, after independence, the government did not focus only on promoting democratic and decentralised government but simultaneously took up the challenge of social and economic change. Its initiatives made a deep impact on the country's political and government systems.

Do you think governments should act to bring equality and economic development in society? What impact will this have on politics? Discuss in the class.

14.2.5 Foreign policy and relations with neighbours

Foreign policy deals with establishing good relations with other countries in the international community. A country's foreign policy is shaped by its ideals, interests and requirements. Before trying to analyse India's foreign policy, we should first understand the political situation in the world at the time the country gained its independence.

After the Second World War, India and other countries of the world, especially those under the control of colonial powers in Asia and Africa, gained their independence. India wanted all these newly independent countries to stand together and support each other. The world at that time was being divided into two political and military blocs. One was the western bloc led by the USA and the other was the eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union. India decided not to side with either of the two blocs because the country needed help from all nations for its economic and social development. If it joined one bloc, it would not get the support of countries in the other bloc. So India chose to tread its own path, independent of the two blocs.



Figure 14.6: Nehru with other leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement

India had another important reason for not aligning with any bloc. Its constitution valued peace and co-existence so it didn't make sense for the country to join either power bloc if it wanted to make global peace and co-existence the plank of its foreign policy. India also wanted to establish its identity among the newly independent countries. So it joined hands with many of these countries to establish the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), with Marshal Tito (Yugoslavia), Dr Sukarno (Indonesia), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt) and Nehru (India) being the prominent leaders of the movement. Its main objective was for the newly independent nations to have a foreign policy that steers a path clear of the US and Soviet Russian blocs to make the bi-polar world into a multi-polar world. The non-aligned nations adopted a policy of not bowing to the dictates of either bloc but deciding on the merits of all international issues.

However, despite its policy of non-alignment, India tilted towards the Soviet Union. One reason for this tilt was India's tense relationship with Pakistan, which had gained the support of Britain and the US. India sought to strengthen its ties with Soviet Russia not just for political support but to seek help for its planned development and industrialisation. The Bhilai Steel Plant was set up with Soviet assistance. But India never joined the Soviet military bloc despite this close support.

In 1954, India signed an agreement with China to establish reciprocal relations. Known as the Panchsheel doctrine, its five principles of peaceful co-existence were:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual non-aggression.
3. Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
4. Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit.
5. Peaceful co-existence.

India adopted the Panchsheel doctrine with all its neighbouring countries but its relations with its neighbours did not improve in spite of these efforts. The relationship with Pakistan had been tense ever since independence, with both countries claiming Kashmir and fighting two wars (1948 and 1965) to establish their claim. Even today, Kashmir remains a point of contention between the two countries.

After an initial period of warmth and friendliness, India's relationship with China, too, began to deteriorate, with tension prevailing along the India-China border and China's control over Tibet also being a conflict point. In 1962, China launched a sudden and unprovoked attack on India, inflicting heavy losses on the Indian army.

Non-alignment and Panchsheel were, thus, the two pillars on which India built its foreign policy in the first two decades after independence. They helped the country carve out an independent space for itself in a world divided into two global power blocs and also influenced its economic development.

Nehru remained the prime minister of India from 1947 to 1963 and played a decisive role in shaping India's democratic and secular government and its industrial development. Lal Bahadur Shastri became the next prime minister and led the country successfully in the 1965 India-Pakistan war, after which he met an untimely death. Indira Gandhi then became prime minister in 1965 and continued in the post until 1977.



Figure 14.7: A postal stamp released on the occasion of the 1967 general elections

14.2.6 Regional parties and the rise of regional movements

The years from 1967 to 1971 was the era of the rise of regional parties and regional movements. The trend began with the 1967 general elections. The social groups that had benefited from the land reforms and economic development in the first two decades after independence had begun organising themselves into political parties. These regional parties sought to establish their political identity by making a bid for power during this election.

Although the Congress party once again won a majority of 284 seats in the Lok Sabha, the 1967 verdict was its worst electoral performance since independence. The party was defeated in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. These defeats altered the electoral landscape of the country, showing that democracy had established strong roots as India progressed to a multi-party political system. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the main opposition party formed the government while in the other states the opposition parties joined hands to form coalition governments. But these coalition governments were unstable and couldn't remain in office for long, with corruption and defections leading to their downfall.

Many regional movements also began to emerge during this phase as regional sentiments once again began to assert themselves. For example, a demand for a separate Telengana state emerged in Andhra Pradesh, led by Osmania University students who complained that only a few regions in the state were benefiting from economic development. In 1969, a new state of Meghalaya was carved out of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribal districts in Assam. Punjab, which had been reorganised in 1966 but did not get Chandigarh as its capital, began agitating to include the city in the state in 1968-69. In Maharashtra, a demand 'Bombay (Mumbai) for Maharashtrians only' was made under the leadership of the Shiv Sena, the main target being the South Indian residents who were accused of snatching jobs from Maharashtrians. The youth in Kashmir, Nagaland and other states also began raising long-standing demands.

14.2.7 National language and the anti-Hindi agitation

The constituent assembly decided after a prolonged debate that no language would be given the status of a national language, though Hindi would be considered the official language of the Indian union. But Hindi was neither spoken nor understood in a huge area of the country. That is why it was decided to continue using English for official purposes for a period of 15 years. At the end of this period, when Hindi was about to be declared the sole official language, protests broke out in the non-Hindi speaking regions of the country.

The strongest protests were in Tamil Nadu, where the DMK party (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) spearheaded the anti-Hindi agitation, launching state-wide strikes and demonstrations. Over 70 people were killed in clashes between the agitators and the police. The Congress party in the state was divided on the issue, with two Congress ministers from the state resigning from the central government. In this situation, the prime minister assured the nation that Hindi would not be imposed in any state without the consent of the people of that state.

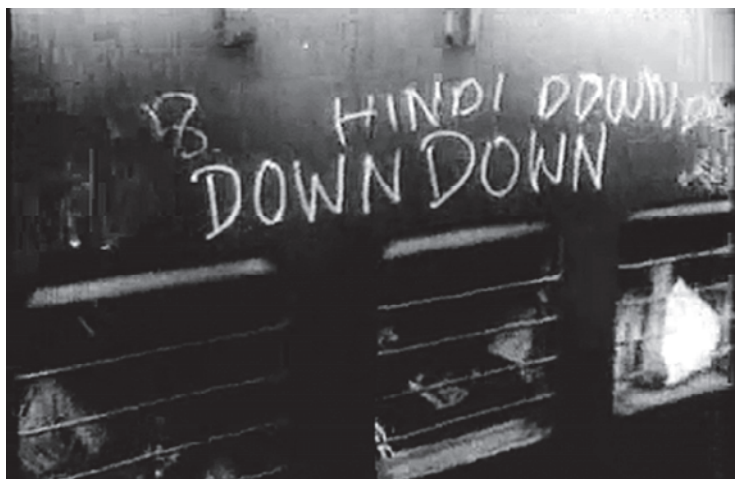


Figure 14.8: Anti-Hindi slogans scrawled on the compartment of a train

However, this assurance did not satisfy the anti-Hindi protestors in Tamil Nadu, who voted against the Congress in the 1967 general elections to defeat the party resoundingly. The central government eventually passed the Official Language (Amendment) Act 1967 to try and satisfy the agitators by guaranteeing the 'virtual indefinite policy of bilingualism'. The new provisions allowed state governments to choose their own official state language. A regional language could also be used in official work along with an English translation, while English would continue to be the link language between the state governments and the central government.

14.3 Important developments in Indian politics after 1967

14.3.1 Nationalisation of banks and abolition of privy purses

India industrialised in the first 20 years after independence but there was no marked reduction in poverty levels and agriculture continued to be neglected. People were restless and dissatisfied. The Congress party's mass appeal and popularity was severely dented in the 1967 general elections. There were dissensions within the party as well. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi introduced some significant pro-poor, anti-rich policy changes to strike a chord with the people and usher in an agricultural revolution. One such anti-rich policy was the abolition of privy purses – grants given by the government after independence to the kings whose territories were merged into the Indian union. She also nationalised several banks so that they could be used to uplift the poor and develop agriculture. A plan was formulated to extend loans and subsidies to farmers and to supply them with improved seed varieties, fertilisers

and pesticides so that they could adopt modern agricultural practices and raise production. This programme came to be known as the green revolution.

14.3.2 The Congress party splits

During this time, dissensions within the Congress party continued to pick up steam. On the one side were the younger leaders - known as the Young Turks – who leaned towards the communist parties in their political thinking and wanted the Congress party to take even more radical pro-poor steps. On the other side were the older, more traditional Congress leaders – known as the Syndicate – who felt that the party should take a more conservative path. Indira Gandhi's socialist policies were widely welcomed by the common people but most of the senior Congress leaders were not happy.

Indira Gandhi sought to establish her credentials as an independent leader by opposing the official Congress party nominee Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy in the presidential elections in 1969 and extending her support to the opposition nominee V.V. Giri. She accused the Congress leadership of putting roadblocks in the way of the government's attempts to implement pro-poor policies. On her urging, many Congress members of parliament and state legislatures cast their votes in favour of VV Giri, enabling him to win the election.

After this episode, the dissensions in the Congress reached a point where the party split into two, one faction under the leadership of Indira Gandhi and the other led by K Kamaraj. Indira Gandhi's party fought the ensuing 1971 Lok Sabha elections and the 1972 state elections on the 'Garibi Hatao' (eliminate poverty) slogan and won a resounding majority. The Kamaraj faction did not find favour with the people so Indira Gandhi's party was established as the real Congress party.

What do you think were the reasons for the split in the Congress party? Discuss in class.

14.3.3 Bangladesh war

At the time India and Pakistan were divided in 1947, East Bengal was included in Pakistan because the majority of its population were Muslims. However, by 1970, tension between the eastern and western wings of Pakistan had grown to the level that the people of East Pakistan began to feel alienated and exploited. The military government of West Pakistan imposed military rule over East Pakistan instead of handing over power to the leaders elected in the recent elections. This led to a civil war between the two wings, with a large stream of refugees fleeing to India to escape the war. Tensions grew



Figure 14.9: Indira Gandhi with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman considered the 'Father of the Nation' of Bangladesh in 1972

between India and Pakistan because of the refugee problem, which led to the outbreak of a war between the two countries in 1971. India succeeded in establishing East Pakistan as an independent country,

which took the name Bangladesh. Indira Gandhi was hailed for her strong and astute leadership that led to the liberation of Bangladesh.

14.3.4 Emergency

There is a provision in the Indian constitution for the government to impose a state of emergency if it feels the integrity of the country is in danger from internal civil strife or a foreign attack. An emergency is an extraordinary situation in which the government can take any steps it sees fit to maintain law and order in the country. It has the authority to suspend civil rights and limit the powers of the elected parliament. It can also impose prohibitions on the media.

The Indira Gandhi government declared an emergency that continued for 21 months from 1975 to 1977. It was the only emergency declared because of internal civil strife in the history of independent India. The factors leading to this unprecedented declaration can be traced to key developments occurring in the country since 1971. Among them were long-term changes, such as growing corruption and the concentration of power in the government. Some were external factors, such as the sudden surge in petroleum prices following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, which led to scarcities as prices rose rapidly in the country.

The government had made populist promises during the 1971 Lok Sabha and 1972 Vidhan Sabha elections but made no serious effort to fulfil these promises. This led to mass dissatisfaction and unrest among the people. There was a sharp upsurge in workers' strikes and anti-corruption movements. Matters reached a head when the railway workers, under the leadership of the All India Railwaymen's Federation, went on the largest-ever strike the country has witnessed in 1974. The government used its armed security forces to try to suppress the strike. At the same time, students in Bihar and Gujarat launched an agitation demanding right to remove unpopular MPs and MLAs.

It was in this situation that the Allahabad High Court unseated Indira Gandhi from the Lok Sabha, declaring her election from the Rae Bareilly constituency as 'null and void'. The entire opposition began a nation-wide agitation under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan, calling for the resignation of what it termed an 'undemocratic' government.



Figure 14.10: Shri Jayaprakash Narayan

This series of developments led Indira Gandhi to declare a state of emergency in the country on June 25, 1975. Overnight, thousands of opposition leaders were imprisoned and the government imposed press censorship, prohibiting newspapers from publishing anything opposed to the government. The government used its majority in parliament to pass several amendments to the constitution that abrogated the rights of the people to form organisations or oppose the government's laws and policies.

The government argued that the agitations were causing instability and the only way to save the nation was by declaring an emergency. On the other hand, the opposition parties argued that the prevailing situation did not warrant the declaration of an emergency. The common citizens, worried about their

right to freedom, felt that the emergency posed a grave threat to Indian democracy. The bitter experiences of the emergency brought the opposition parties together, barring the communist parties, to form the Janata Dal to contest the 1977 elections. These elections showed that the people of India were against the emergency, electing the Janata Dal with a resounding majority and rejecting the Congress party's policies.

The Janata Dal formed the government after emerging victorious. But internal contradictions among its constituent parties soon began to surface. As a result, the Janata Dal could not complete its term in government, leading to a fresh general election in 1980 in which the Congress party secured a majority and Indira Gandhi once again became prime minister.

Was the declaration of a state of emergency justified or not? Discuss with the help of your teacher.

What impact did the declaration of emergency have on the daily life of the people and on the opposition parties?

14.4 Rise of regional aspirations and decentralisation of power

Indian politics was going through an authoritarian phase after 1970 that led to centralisation of power. The central government was gaining more control of the country's economy. On the other, Indira Gandhi was strengthening her hold on the Congress party by side-lining all its regional leaders. In this situation, the people in the states were finding it difficult to realise their aspirations. Tension kept building up in Jammu-Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Assam and other states. Some states used the constitutional provisions to challenge the centralisation. Some movements challenged the constitution itself and the unity of the nation. We shall see two examples of how the country was able to survive these grave challenges.

14.4.1 Punjab agitation

The Sikhs, who form the majority of Punjab's population, were unhappy with the continued neglect of their community and religion by the state from the time India gained independence. The green revolution had brought prosperity to Sikh cultivators but they felt that they could not progress without political autonomy. They launched a protest movement under the leadership of the Shiromani Akali Dal, a religious and political organisation of the community. The agitation had the following main demands:

1. The constitution should be suitably amended to give more power to the states.
2. Chandigarh should be handed over to Punjab.
3. Enlistment of Sikhs into the armed forces should be increased.
4. Punjab should get a larger share of water from the Bhakra Nangal dam.

The Akali Dal passed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 to press the demands of the Sikhs, particularly the first two. It also raised the issue of creating a Sikh state to establish the Sikh identity and restore Sikh pride. It began to organise demonstrations and rail blockades after 1978 to press these demands.

Around this time, the Sikh religious leader and preacher Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale began fighting for the Sikh cause, launching more militant protests against the government. He took sanctuary in the

compound of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar in 1983. He fortified the compound, raising the demand for an independent Khalistan, which received widespread support from the Sikh youth.

The protestors began to target liberal Sikhs and people of other religions. The government claimed that they were being backed by Pakistan. It initially took a conciliatory approach to the insurgency. But in June 1984, the Indira Gandhi government decided to use armed force to break Bhindranwale's hold over the Golden Temple complex and capture the separatists who were holed up in the Akal Takht, the seat of Sikh religious authority. More than 500 people were killed in the ensuing military operations that were code-named Operation Blue Star.

The desecration of the holiest of Sikh shrines was a grievous blow to the feelings of the Sikh community. It led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi by one of her Sikh bodyguards. There was widespread reaction to the assassination. Thousands of Sikhs lost their lives in the anti-Sikh riots that swept across the country.

Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister in October 1984 after Indira Gandhi's assassination, with the Congress party winning an unprecedented victory in the ensuing general elections. Rajiv Gandhi entered into an agreement with the Akali Dal in July 1985 in a bid to re-establish peace in Punjab. Called the 'Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal accord', it promised to review the Akali demands sympathetically, including giving Chandigarh to Punjab and other issues. Elections were held in Punjab, which the Akali Dal won to form the government. Terrorist activities were gradually brought under control after this through sustained police action.

14.4.2 Assam movement

Demands for greater autonomy began to be raised in Assam in the decade of the 1970s. The Assamese people felt that the resources of their state were being exploited by people from other states and they were treated as second class citizens in their own state. The tea gardens of Assam were controlled by companies from Calcutta. The petroleum from the Assam oilfields was also going to refineries in other states for processing. As a result, people in Assam had less employment opportunities.



Figure 14.11 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi with leaders of the Assam Movement

Another point of conflict was language. Apart from Assamese, Bengali is a prominent language in the state. During British rule, Bengali-speaking people were recruited in large numbers in the government. The Assamese-speaking people felt that the Bengali-speaking government employees treated them as second class citizens. The situation was aggravated by migrants from Bangladesh who crossed the border in large numbers in search of a livelihood.

The anger of the Assamese took the form of a social movement in 1975 under the leadership of the All Assam Students Union (AASU). Agitations, demonstrations and *bandhs* were organised to protest against foreigners settled in the state. The movement had important economic, cultural and demographic angles. Its main demands were to rid the state of foreigners, give preference to local people in employment and use the resources of the state for the development of the Assamese people.

One major demand of the agitators was that the citizenship of migrants from Bangladesh should be revoked and they should be deported from the state. The demand divided the people of the state along communal lines because the majority of Bangladeshi migrants were Muslims. The growing violence and the threat of disintegration led to the intervention of the central government. After three years of discussion, an agreement was eventually reached between the agitating students and the government.

Under the terms of the agreement, all migrants who had settled in the state before 1961 were granted citizenship, those who came between 1961 and the Bangladesh war were permitted to settle but would not have the right to vote, and those who came after 1971 were to be deported. The Asom Gana Parishad, which emerged out of the AASU, won a resounding victory in the ensuing general elections.

The country saw many similar movements representing regional aspirations and demanding the formation of new states. Mizoram, Uttarakhand, Telangana, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are the result of such regional aspirations.

14.4.3 Panchayati Raj and decentralisation of state power

Rajiv Gandhi felt that government schemes were not benefiting the poor. He claimed that only 15 paise out of every rupee spent by the government for the poor was reaching them. He believed that decentralisation of power was the solution to the problem. It would permit greater participation of the common people and ensure that they would get the benefits of schemes designed for them. The constitution was amended in 1986 to allow decentralisation of power through the Panchayati Raj Act. This act gave power to the panchayats to plan and implement schemes for village development. It also gave the poor, and women in particular, the opportunity to participate in government at the local level. It was made mandatory for all the states to enact their own Panchayati Raj Act.

Do you think the only objective of the Punjab and Assam movements was to replace the Congress government in those states or were there other more important reasons behind these movements?

Why do you think that India witnessed a process of decentralisation of state power after 1950?

Do you agree with Rajiv Gandhi's statement that the benefits of government schemes was not reaching the poor?

Do you think Panchayati Raj ushered in the decentralisation of power and actually led to the poor receiving greater benefits from government schemes?

14.5 Politics of regionalism, communalism, religion and coalition governments

In the previous section we saw the rise of regional aspirations among people in the states, which led to the creation of regional parties. During this period, many such parties were formed across the country whose sole aim was to create a space for their communities, which had been excluded from the political

process till now. Dalits and middle-level farming communities like the Jats formed their own political organisations. There were also many communities that had improved their economic condition but were still backward in education and politics. They began to demand reservations in education and employment.

In 1989, the coalition government headed by Vishwanath Pratap Singh decided to reserve 27 percent of all posts in educational institutions and public sector employment for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). There were violent protests by upper caste youth. But these protests did not prevent the government from passing the reservation law, which paved the way for these classes to establish their political clout. In addition to caste and regional identities, people also began to assert their religious identity.

Thus, after 1985, we can see the development of political parties with narrow identities to represent the interests of a particular community or caste or region. One widespread impact of this development was that no political party could win a majority on its own in the general elections, so the governments that were formed were mostly a coalition of several parties. This situation has prevailed ever since the 1989 general election. Some of the coalition governments that were formed were unstable and could not complete their term in office.

Coalition governments marked a new phase in Indian politics. In the first four decades after independence, the country had one-party rule. But after 1990, India moved towards a multi-party system. The first few years of multi-party politics were marked by unstable coalitions. But over the past 15 years, the country has seen relatively stable coalition governments in office. Coalition politics provided greater scope to many small, regional parties to represent the interests of different sections of society. Better coordination techniques between parties also helped to resolve the problem of instability. One such technique was for all parties in the government to adopt a minimum common programme that incorporated all their viewpoints, thus representing the interests of the electoral majority.

In 1947, many political analysts felt that India was not suited or ready for democracy based on universal franchise. Has the history of the past 60 years proved or disproved their fears and doubts right? How far do you think they were correct in their assessment?

In 1947, many political analysts felt that religion was the only basis on which India could form a nation. Has the history of the past 60 years proved their fears and doubts right? How far do you think they were correct in their assessment?

In 1947, many political analysts felt that India could not survive as a nation state. They felt that the country would break up into many small states and, if it didn't, regional aspirations would be trampled upon and suppressed. Has the history of the past 60 years proved their fears and doubts right? How far do you think they were correct in their assessment?

In 1952, many people believed that India would be able to establish equality and harmony among all its citizens with the help of its new constitution. To what extent has the history of the past 60 years proved their faith right or wrong?

In 1976, many people felt that citizens' rights needed to be curtailed and India could only be ruled by a dictatorship or an authoritarian leader. Do you think subsequent experiences have proved the hollowness of such claims?

What do you think are the challenges facing democratic politics in India today?

EXERCISES

1. Fill in the blanks in the following:

1. The first general elections in independent India were conducted in
2. The party got an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha elections in 1952, 1957 and 1962.
3. The zamindari system was abolished in and the tenants were given title deeds to their land.
4. The Code Bill was first presented to the constituent assembly by
5. undertook a fast unto death to demand the creation of a state for the Telugu-speaking people.
6. is the official language of India.
7. The use of scientific techniques in agriculture to increase grain production is known as the revolution.
8. The ending of special privileges, titles and allowances extended to royal families after independence is called the abolition of
9. A state of emergency was declared from to on the basis of internal civil strife.
10. The military operations to cleanse the Golden Temple of terrorists was called Operation

2. Choose the right option for each of the following:

1. 'Only 15 paise in every rupee spent reaches the people.' What did the Rajiv Gandhi government do to resolve this problem?
 1. Made it compulsory for the states to implement Panchayati Raj.
 2. Gave 27% reservation for Other Backward Classes.
 3. Signed the Longowal-Rajiv Gandhi Accord.
 4. Signed an agreement to revoke the citizenship of Bangladeshis and deport them.
2. The main demands of the Punjab movement did not include:
 1. Amending the constitution to give more power to the states.
 2. Handing over Chandigarh to Punjab and the demand for Khalistan.
 3. Higher enlistment of Sikhs into the armed forces.
 4. Give a larger share of water from the Sardar Sarovar dam to Punjab.

3. The main demands of the Assam movement were:
 1. Deporting of foreign (Bangladeshi) nationals.
 2. Giving preference to local people in employment.
 3. Using Assam's resources to set up industries in the state to create jobs.
 4. Reorganise Assam state on the basis of language.
4. Which state was not impacted by the anti-Hindi agitation?
 1. Maharashtra
 2. Tamil Nadu
 3. Assam
 4. Andhra Pradesh.
5. Which of the following was not part of the Panchsheel Doctrine:
 1. Non-aggression
 2. Non-interference
 3. Peaceful co-existence
 4. Non-alignment
6. Which country was not a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement:
 1. Indonesia
 2. Egypt
 3. Yugoslavia
 4. China
7. The economic system established by the Planning Commission was:
 1. Socialism
 2. Mixed economy
 3. Capitalism
 4. Marxism
8. Even after adopting the policy of non-alignment, India established strong ties with:
 1. America
 2. Soviet Russia
 3. China
 4. Pakistan
9. The innovation India made to tackle the problem of illiteracy in the first Lok Sabha elections was to:
 1. Provide separate ballot boxes for each party.
 2. Provide a separate election symbol and ballot box for each candidate.
 3. Train the people on how to cast their vote.
 4. Create a system to make people literate.
10. The main reason for the opposition to the Hindu Code Bill was:
 1. Fear of change in the Hindu religion and social system.
 2. Establishment of equality between men and women.
 3. Fear of ending the caste system.
 4. The right to religious freedom.

3. Write the answers to the following:

1. Why did Dr Ambedkar resign from the cabinet of ministers?
2. What opportunities did the Hindu Code Bill provide for equality between men and women?
3. What were the fears that prevented the formulation of a Common Civil Code? What were the views of Ambedkar and Nehru on this issue?
4. Why was language the sole basis of reorganising the states? Give reasons.
5. What were the positive outcomes of forming states on a linguistic basis?
6. How did planned development strengthen the hands of the government?
7. What were the economic policies and objectives of the Indian government in the first two Five Year Plans?
8. What was the contribution of the first prime minister in drafting the constitution, states reorganisation, Planning Commission and foreign policy.
9. Which were the main foreign policy principles established by Jawaharlal Nehru?
10. What were the similarities and differences in the Punjab and Assam movements?
11. Why did the constitution not give Hindi the status of a national language? Give reasons.
12. Why did the Congress split during the time of Indira Gandhi?
13. What was the emergency? What were the undemocratic activities of the government during the 1975-77 emergency period?
14. What were the steps taken during Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership to address regional aspirations?

Project work

1. Find out the amendments made to the constitution during the emergency period. Which of these amendments were revoked after the emergency? Make a poster exhibition of these provisions.
2. Which were the coalition governments that were formed between 1990 and 2000? Make a poster exhibition of their main contributions and shortcomings.