PRATAP BHANU MEHTA
Center for Policy Research, Delhi

State and Democracy in India

Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between state and democracy in India. It probes the paradox that representative government is not always responsive government. There is a persistant gap between the practices of popular authorisation and the production of legitimacy. It examines this gap from two different directions. On the one hand, it looks at the the myriad mechanisms by which the strucutre of the state impedes democracy. On the other hand it looks at how inherited social inequality produces forms of politics that make the production of shared legitimacy difficult.

Keywords: State, democracy, legitimacy, India, social inequalities.

Preface

This paper proceeds in the following order. In the introduction I make some remarks about the study of Indian democracy and try give a formulation to what exactly one is looking at in the considering democracy versus authoritarianism in India. In the next section, I argue the real challenge for Indian democracy is what I call the gap between democracy and legitimacy. This is a specific theoretical notion that does not question the legitimacy of democracy. But it asks two questions: Does democracy necessarily produce outcomes that all citizens can accept? I discuss some theoretical issues in relation to democracy and legitimacy and argue that the relationship between these two concepts is contingent. In order to produce accountable institutions, the gap between legitimacy and accountability needs to be bridged. But this gap can be bridged only by taking into account the regulative ideal of politics citizens operate with. What are the set of expectations that citizens bring to politics, and how do these expectations shape what democracy produces. Despite many imperfections, democracy is a form of government that aspires to honor the standing of citizens as free and equal persons. While there is considerable debate over the degree to which democracy promotes or impedes growth, there is less doubt that the democratic aspiration is itself a vital component of development. Recognizing the status of individuals as citizens rather than mere subjects, expanding their rights and their freedoms to define their own lives, protecting them from the exercise of arbitrary power and making government accountable through greater participation of the governed, are central components of the development aspiration itself. Representative constitutional democracies are a mode of organizing government through which these aspirations are recognized. Yet in prac-

tice, the actual functioning of democracies often honors the promise of accountability only in its breach. This paper is an attempt to examine the obstacles to producing accountable government even in well-established democracies. In particular, it pursues two lines of inquiry. First, it examines the degree to which inherited forms of social inequality cast a long shadow on democracies and distort its functioning. In some ways, this is a familiar argument: inequalities in wealth for instance, often determine access to power. But this paper's argument is that social inequality may distort the functioning of democracy by redefining the very meaning of politics in such societies in such a way that a politics of common citizenship becomes difficult to achieve.

The second line of inquiry this paper pursues is this. In democracies the actual organization of government, the authority structures that assign particular responsibilities to particular parts of government and define the pathways through which government power flows, are exceedingly complex. To some extent, this complexity is inevitable in modern societies. But this paper examines, briefly, the degree to which the mode of organizing authority in a democracy can also impede the creation of accountable government. Section two looks at features of the regulative of ideal of politics in India that have enhanced the gap between democracy and legitimacy. The final section looks at different institutional aspects of accountability and treats, in turn, questions of institutional design and the impediments to making electoral accountability more effective. The paper treats all of the questions simultaneously because its central argument is that these different aspects of the accountability problem are related and attacking one in isolation does not help.

Introduction

India has, in many ways, been something of a curiosity in discussions of democracy and authoritarianism. India remained an outlier by the lights of most theories of democracy that look at structural variables to predict the prospects of a country instituting and remaining a democracy such as class structure, extent of ethnic diversity, level of income and education. (Moore 1966; Lijhpart 1999; Przeworski 2000). The sense of intellectual surprise at Indian democracy was captured in a recent conference when one of the participants, paraphrasing Groucho Marx, said about Indian democracy "It looks a like a democracy. It talks like a democracy. But don't be fooled by that. It really is a democracy." It is something of a measure of the success of Indian Democracy, that whatever other anxieties might be expressed about its future—its capacity to deliver material wellbeing to large number of its citizens, its capacity to create a sense of national identity itself without conflict, its capacity to manage social tensions arising out of the process of development—a slide into an authoritarian system of governance is not high on the list. India does well on other measures of success in a democracy: voter turn outs, turnover of incumbents, the empowering of new groups, the maintaining of a core set of liberal freedoms, civilian control over armed forces, political contestation. Democracy in India is as much of an established fact as its success is a matter of surprise to political scientists.

How does one think about the Indian democratic experience? This question has both an explanatory and a normative dimension. I do not want to go deep into the explanatory dimension. But I want to make one methodological general remark about how one goes about explaining such "success" as the Indian democratic experience has had. I think one big change in the studies of democracy is that the focus had shifted from a *theory* explaining Indian democracy to concrete *mechanisms* by which this democracy has been sustained (Khilnani 1997, Kaviraj 2001, Mehta 2003, Guha 2007, Kapur 2004) These narratives of Indian democracy, rather than emphasizing one or two variables—a propitious class structure, or cultural norms or such things—emphasize the extent to which a whole host of factors, from the colonial legacy to the character of India's inherited institutions, from the beliefs of its leaders to the character of social divisions, interact with each other to sustain democratic institutions. But the important point that emerges out of these narratives is this. Indian democracy is an ongoing exercise in *political improvisation*: its trajectory has not been determined by structural conditions, but has, at each step, been shaped by a number of contingent political choices. It is often said that modern India is creation of politics; arguably the same is true of Indian democracy. An explanation of its success and limitations, does not lie outside of the space of politics. The weakness of a lot of the earlier literature on Indian democracy was that it was united in its impulse to explain Indian democracy in terms outside of the space of politics, rather than through politics itself and the concrete and contingent choices made by the myriad actors who make up Indian democracy. Obviously there is some sense in which background structural conditions matter, but much of the literature does not acknowledge the extent to which choices have shaped outcomes.

In some respects it is an astounding fact that there was near unanimity in the nationalist movement as early as the 1920's that India should have universal suffrage, when no precedent would have warranted reposing confidence in a largely unlettered and unpropertied population being given the vote. It is a remarkable fact that, with some limitations, India's principal political party in the nationalist movement, the Congress chose to organize itself along democratic lines, at least providing mechanisms for incorporating new groups as they emerged. It is a remarkable fact that the mainstream of its anti-colonial movement distanced itself from a politics of violence, which had a fundamental impact on the character of political organizations that occupied mainstream space in India. It is a remarkable fact that the Indian Constituent Assembly managed to come up with a remarkable constitution, that still potently defines so many of the normative aspirations of democratic India. The choice of a first past the post electoral system, the introduction of mechanisms like reservations for marginalized groups, the moderation that allows twenty party coalitions to get into relatively stable governments, or even Indira Gandhi's decision to lift emergency rule in 1977, are not easily explained in terms of background structural conditions. It is astonishing that India's political class is reluctant to undermine the legitimacy of an independent commission such as the Election Commission that oversees the independence of elections in India. These are just some of the remarkable choices made by political actors, choices that are not easily explained by in non-po-

litical terms. Indian democracy has been imaginatively constituted rather than structurally determined.

Before I get to the heart of the paper, a few more preliminary points. The first is about the relationship between democracy, authoritarianism and nationalism. Nationalism is often said to be the crucible of modern democracy (Greenfeld 1992). In some sense India is no different. Colonial rule in India, rested, amongst other things on two propositions: that India was not a nation with any sense of corporate identity; it was not capable of self-government because it was not a *people*. Second, that it was not ready for democracy. Under such conditions any critique of colonialism must assume that the colonized society can be a self-governing nation. But Indians could demand self determination only by appealing to the authority of a new presence in the social imaginary of something called the Indian people. But this would require 1) privileging their status as members of this people—as citizens of nation being born over more restrictive older identifications such as caste or region. But the remarkable thing about this process is that the Indian nation that emerged through a *political* negotiation with these identities rather than erasing them. But more importantly, it was almost impossible to conceive this people coming into being without granting them a modicum of participatory access. In short anti-colonial nationalism in India tended to carry democratic ideas along its logical train. Here paradoxically, an act of political imagination turned the colonial argument on its head. The colonial argument went: India cannot be self-governing because it is not a people. The nationalist argument went: the idea of an Indian people can be constituted only through shared institutions of participatory access. It does not have an identity outside of this process and mechanisms of political negotiation and participation. This point is of some importance because there is a sense in which many Indians believe, rightly, that India can be a nation only so long as it is a democracy; there is no nation building project outside the democratic framework. If India had sustained periods of authoritarian rule, the idea of India itself would be in jeopardy; it is a nation conceived and sustained through political negotiation.

But this point is also important way of characterizing the specificity of the Indian anxiety about authoritarianism. First, it is a remarkable fact that wherever the Indian state has tried democratic incorporation of its diversity, it has largely succeeded. State subverting secessionist movements are more likely to emerge when the Indian state acts in an authoritarian rather than democratic mode. Second, the specter of authoritarianism towards particular groups arises often when there is an attempt to benchmark Indian identity outside of the space of politics, to see it not as a product of an ongoing democratic negotiation, but to locate it in a particular "ethnic" characteristic like religion or race. The specter of authoritarianism in India is not associated with the suspension of the electoral process or military takeovers, but with the possibility that certain political movements will define a conception of India that will be exclusionary, and therefore authoritarian in relation to certain groups. While this tendency has a presence in Indian politics, it has not garnered sufficient power to dislodge India's democratic credentials. But the sense that "no democracy, no Indian Nation" has, to a certain extent helped sustain democracy.

A second preliminary point is that the attraction of democracy for India elites has been precisely that it is ameliorative rather revolutionary. Nothing illustrates this better than the case of land reform. Contrary to most eighteenth century fears of democracy, it has turned out to be, as Tocqueville prophesied, a relatively conservative force. There are very few instances of radical land reform measures being voted in through democratic means; most radical land reforms have involved a degree of violence and coercion. While the ideological commitment to democracy amongst Indian elites was undoubtedly very strong, their sense that democracy could be used to create their power anew in a new form was equally sharp. In some senses the slowness of democracy in delivering social and economic change, its capacity to blunt radical edges, turned out to be an advantage from the point of view of democracy. To minimize the impact democracy has had on the transformation of social relations in India, or to deny its ability to open these up for contestation would be to falsify the record. But equally, to deny that most democracies are not radical when it comes to redistributive politics, would also be to miss out on one of the sources of its attractiveness to elites.

Just as a heuristic contrast I want to pose the following question. Does Representative Government automatically imply Responsive Government? Here is general consideration I have in mind. Suppose there was a government that claimed legitimacy in terms of certain process that authorized it, namely elections. Suppose you asked this particular government: Why should you be considered the legitimate government of X? The answer involves some appeal to a process by which the government came to be constituted? Legitimacy in this sense is legitimacy on the input side. Such a government would, ex hypothesis, do all it can to ensure that it masters the process that gives it the right to be the legitimate government, particularly win elections. Its bedrock claim would be that it is a representative government, in some sense of the term. It is not representative simply because it says so, but that there is *some process* that makes it representative.

Now suppose there was a government that could not appeal to such a regularly instituted process to claim legitimacy. It might appeal to other things to claim legitimacy: pragmatic considerations, historical claims, ideology. But this regime's claims will simply be *its* claims, there is no independent process through which the extent to which these claims are shared by the population at large can be validated. In short there is no independent legitimacy on the input side. Such legitimacy as this government claims will be on the output side, trying to convince more people that this government is indeed the best for them.

Which government would be more "responsive" to the people? You could cut the argument both ways. At one level you could say that a government whose legitimacy has to be constituted through the electoral process has to be responsive; government whose legitimacy is not so constituted needn't be. On the other hand, think of the reverse possibility. A government that is constituted through the electoral process is responsive to the extent that it needs to stitch together some kind of electoral support. But it is possible that under some circumstances stitching together this support has little to do with being responsive. We know that elections can be very blunt instruments of accountability in terms of the way they aggregate preferences. The degree to which

it is blunt instrument will depend upon a lot of factors: the party system, the system of voting the nature of preference formation and so on. But it is in principle possible that mastering the art of winning elections may not have as much to do with responding to the public at large as we would like to think. But this regime will still not be illegitimate; in a curious way, the process will act as a palliative against discontent.

On the other hand, a "non-representative system" could, under certain conditions produce a great degree of responsiveness. This regime might say: "For our legitimacy we cannot appeal to a process. We have to keep delivering outcomes that ensure levels of dissatisfaction do not cross a certain threshold. Such a regime could, under certain circumstances, depending on its ability to process information etc., be more responsive. It might have to work harder to secure its legitimacy, precisely because it does not have the support of a "process" behind it. Of course such a regime is unlikely to do justice to the intrinsic normative value of democracy; but it could along certain dimensions of well-being, be very responsive.

This stylized contrast has two points. The first is to suggest that the degree to which particular regimes are responsive, and the dimensions along which they are responsive is an interesting empirical question. One fruitful agenda for India-China comparisons is to ask just this kind of question. In the nineteenth century Hegel said something to the effect that China was all state, no civil society; India was all civil society no state, a contrast that still has some heuristic value. Perhaps the twenty first century analogue would be the following: India is a representative system, but there are question marks about the degree to which it is responsive. China claims to be a responsive system, but there are interesting issues about the extent to which it can do so without being "representative."

The rest of this paper, rather than looking at Indian democracy in self congratulatory mode, tries to look at the gap between representation and responsiveness in the Indian system, which is perhaps a more germane version of the authoritarianism versus democracy contrast. In the next section I give this gap a more theoretical formulation and then explore some institutional mechanisms which need to be addressed if this gap is to be closed.

Responsiveness, Legitimacy and Democracy

Any discussion of responsiveness, especially in democratic societies, misses a good deal if, it does not begin with some account of the relationship between two key concepts—democracy and legitimacy. In many discussions the relationship between these two concepts remains obscure and often leads to a fundamental confusion over the requirements of good governance. Indeed, it is my contention that the fundamental challenge of creating accountable institutions is to bridge the gap between democracy and legitimacy. But bridging that gap requires two things: first, properly designed institutions and second, an appropriate conception of politics, that is an account of the norms and expectations that citizens bring to their political conduct. In the first part of the paper, I briefly elaborate on this point.

What do I mean by the gap between democracy and legitimacy? The association of the two concepts is largely contingent. The concept of legitimacy concerns the reasons persons who stand in particular political and social relations have for accepting those relations. Legitimacy involves an answer to the question: are political relations in which citizens stand in relation to each other, or to those who exercise power over them, acceptable to them? Put in utopian terms, the modern understanding of legitimacy is this: legitimacy obtains when the terms of the political relations, and the reasons given for the exercise of political power, are mutually acceptable and freely chosen.

Democracy, on the other hand, is a way of constituting political power such that its exercise receives popular authorization. In order for this authorization to be meaningful, we stipulate certain baseline conditions. This popular authorization must take place against the backdrop of political equality and basic freedom. A proper theory of democratic governance will have to connect two things: a political practice, namely popular authorization with a standard of justification, and the idea of mutual acceptability. Popular authorization alone cannot bear the burden of legitimizing the exercise of governing power. It is possible that citizens may experience a certain kind of alienation even from a political process where practices of popular authorization are well established, if these practices do not produce outcomes that are mutually acceptable.

There are many ways of explaining the gap between democracy and legitimacy. Most explanations focus on the ways in which the workings of popular authorization are distorted by the operations of power in any given society. Actual democracies work in the context of a good of social and economic inequality and manipulation that, in turn, bears upon democracy itself. Other explanations focus on the ways in which the institutional organization of power within democracies can impede the production of mutually acceptable agreements. There is much truth in these cautionary tales as empirical studies of functioning democracies reveal. But these accounts miss out on one important dimension that I would like to stress here. For democracy to realize in political practice the requirements of legitimacy, it is necessary that those participating in democratic politics share common beliefs about the aspiration of democracy: reaching mutually acceptable agreements. These shared beliefs about the aims of democracy must shape political conduct. It is important to emphasize that there is nothing intrinsic about the practice of democracy to suggest that citizens will in fact share the ambition of reaching mutually acceptable agreements.

The political theory of democratic legitimacy relies on a resource that democracy itself cannot produce or secure: the practical and regulative aim of those engaged in democracy to reach mutually acceptable agreements. Democracies, such as India's, can be stable for a variety of reasons: for instance, the contingent balance and fragmentation of power among different groups may enable practices of popular authorization to take place. But the fact that a democracy is institutionalized does not entail that citizens share some regulative ideals about democracy. However, this poses a challenge for any conception of accountability. For accountability to be possible the practices of citizenship, the ensemble of values by which citizens orient their conduct

toward each other, must include the desire to find mutually acceptable agreements. Otherwise the core question of accountability—accountability to whom and at what terms—cannot be answered. In short, if citizens do not aspire to live in a world governed by terms that all can freely accept, then it is difficult to give theoretical and practical content to accountability.

If the aim of accountability is to produce policies and relations we could, as citizens, freely accept, then citizens have to be governed by the desire to find mutually acceptable agreements. They must share the regulative aim of reaching agreement by coming together to reason publicly as free and equal persons. Too often in technical debates over accountability we lose sight of the overall normative underpinnings of accountability. These depend on the practices of citizenship, the expectations and demands citizens place on each other.

Accountability, Legitimacy and Politics: The Indian Case

Indian democracy, deeply entrenched and competitive as it is, is not governed by a shared ideal of finding mutually acceptable agreements. Instead of this ideal, politics is marked by a conception of competition in which to hold the state accountable is to gain access to its power and the goods it provides. It is not to produce a politics of accountability to all those affected by the state's decisions. I argue that competitive ideal of politics is a product of two things: first, historical legacies of inequality and second, a particular conception of the state. These inflect some of the parameters by which the state is held accountable. But taken together, they impede the creation of a society where people are governed by relations they find acceptable.

Democratic aspirations are in some senses tied to the idea of equality. The idea of equality is complex and immediately invites the question, "Equality of What?" Income? Wealth? Political Equality? Opportunity? But understanding the political trajectory of Indian democracy does not require beginning with an answer to this question. In any society, especially democratic ones, the meaning and scope of equality will be fiercely contested and will be the basis for ideological divisions. Rather, it is the psychological impulses that lie behind the demand for equality; the existential burdens that any demand for equality seeks to address that leave their imprint on politics. The varieties of structures, caste, class and patriarchy, which maintain and reproduce inequality, are all too familiar, and Indian society exemplifies many of these to an unconscionable degree. But inequality is not simply a structural condition in which people find themselves; a condition measured by such objective indicators as Gini coefficients or development indices. Inequality is resented, and becomes salient for politics, because it is experienced as an existential burden that inflicts complex psychic costs by diminishing a sense of self. Not all forms of inequality are unjust. And the ways in which the experience of inequality shapes the self is a complex subject. But fundamentally inequality imposes the profoundest existential burdens when it is seen as denying individuals the minimum regard due to them, or when it constantly puts them in situations that are experienced as humiliating.

It is now a commonplace observation, thanks largely to Rousseau who most vividly wrote about the psychic burdens of inequality, that most human beings, unless they have been dehumanized to an unimaginable degree, place some value upon themselves (Rousseau [1756] 1997). This does not mean that they are selfish; it is rather that they place some value upon themselves and wish that this value be somewhere affirmed. The institutions and practices of most inegalitarian societies deny individuals this basic form of recognition, the recognition that they are valuable in some sense, that they have some moral standing. In most societies this quest for having one's worth affirmed will take debased forms. The only way in which you can secure acknowledgement by others is either by seeking to dominate them, or by putting a convincing show of attributes and accomplishments that are capable of winning the acknowledgment of others. Inegalitarian societies, where there is no public acknowledgment of individual self worth, will be characterized by both a fierce competition to dominate, and paradoxically, an exaggerated sense of servility. These are the two strategies of securing acknowledgement. Both desire to dominate and a kind of self abasement, Rousseau suggested, would lead us to lead inauthentic lives: lives that were not governed by values and concerns that were properly our own. Such societies would also frequently give individuals reasons to consider their self respect injured: inegalitarian societies will routinely humiliate its members.

The aspiration to democracy is in part an aspiration to have one's moral worth acknowledged. The charge that an arrangement or a set of procedures is "undemocratic" carries moral resonance, not simply because it describes a faulty procedure, but because it is accompanied by the sentiment that, in being undemocratic, someone's moral standing has been slighted. Acknowledgment by others of your moral worth is at least partly constitutive of an individual's sense of self respect.

What institutions and objectives can satisfy the minimal requirements of acknowledging people's moral worth is a debatable one. But at the very least, freedom from abject necessity, removal of invidious and humiliating forms of discrimination, some equality of opportunity and access to a set of goods that are minimal requirements for being a capable agent in the modern world. The great liberal hope, embodied in the Indian constitution, was that ameliorating serious material deprivation, and an effective equal standing in the eyes of the law would go some way toward mitigating the desire to have one's worth affirmed, either by dominating others, or by having one's own sense of self fashioned by what we think might get others attention.

The paradox is that the more unequal the background institutions and practices of society, the more likely it is that politics will be a struggle to displace the holders of power rather than an ambition to bring about social transformation. The struggle to move ahead will not be a common struggle for justice—for little commonality exists—but a competitive quest for power. A society that is adept at humiliating its members is, as Rousseau convincingly argued, more likely to make them adept at humiliating others than it is to teach them about justice. This perhaps explains one of the paradoxes at the heart of Indian politics. There are few other democracies where the universal language of injustice, rights, even constitutionalism is so profusely used and has become part of so many political mobiliza-

tions. But it is a stratagem for particular individuals or groups to gain access to power, not an acknowledgment of the due claims of all. Discourses of law, constitutionalism, rights, justice, obligations, do not signify that a particular set of values are being taken as authoritative and these set genuine moral constraints for individuals. Rather, they are the languages in which particular grievances are expressed or interests advanced without the least acknowledgment of reciprocal or parallel interests and grievances of others. A sense of justice toward someone presupposes a sense of reciprocity; it presupposes that you acknowledge others. The more the social distance, the less likely that such reciprocity obtains. It is quite possible for a democracy to experience great clamor for recognition by particular individuals and groups without these resulting in diffusion of norms of justice. This follows the general pattern of the ways in which Indian society has been democratized. Democracy in India has advanced through the competitive negotiations between groups, each competing for their interests, rather than the diffusion of democratic norms. It is, in that sense, a contingent outcome of social conflicts, not necessarily a deep-seated norm. The purpose of political mobilization has not been to make the state more accountable, but to get access to or share in its power[1] (Mehta 2003).

This conception of politics was most dramatically manifest in the way in which citizens often thought of the state. Given the commanding presence of the state, underwritten by an ideology of state-led development, access to state power became, for good or for bad, the principal means of improving the life chances of individuals. Politics, through access to state power, has become the swiftest route toward social mobility. In a strange kind of way, compared with the market, or educational institutions, politics of all kinds, from the most ambitious aspiration for power to the interest in gaining smallest benefits, came to be seen as a surer route to social mobility. Access to the state gave jobs and a likely class status that was better than anything available outside the state; the discretionary power the state conferred on all its officials was experienced by many as empowerment, or at least an escape from the subordination that resulted from being at the receiving end of that power. Access to state power was about the only way of ensuring that one counted for somebody.

But the consequence of the growth of the state and its undoubted success in producing a kind of social mobility is attended by a paradox: namely, that once the state is seen as a means for social mobility, it is not, for the most part, seen as the provider of public goods. The state is adjudged to be successful, the more opportunities for large numbers of private individuals it can create through its own spending: if the number of government jobs expands for instance, even when not required, this is adjudged to be a political success, regardless of the opportunity cost this form of job creation imposes on others. The state exists primarily to satisfy the private interests of collusive interest groups. The *raison d'etre* of politics, the aims

---

[1] To some extent, this is a feature of all existing democracies. No democracy approximates the idea of mutual reciprocity outlined here. But, in each of these instances, it is background historical inequalities that act as lasting impediments to achieving reciprocity. So this argument is valid not only for India, though the degree and nature of inherited inequalities may vary considerably.

of public representation are no longer to respond to fundamental issues impinging upon common life but to organize the state's power in such a way that its resources can be channeled in the direction of particular groups or individuals to protect their exclusive interests. This form of competitive politics can produce an equilibrium that sustains democracy. But it is quite compatible with a wide gap between democracy and accountable institutions. And this gap can be bridged only if citizens change their understanding of what politics is about.

Accountability: The Institutional Story

To begin with, we operate with a basic and simple concept of accountability: for a person or institution X to be accountable to an agent Y is for X to act on behalf of Y, and for Y to be empowered by some formal or informal mechanism to reward or sanction X for their activities.

While the basic concept is simple, the institutional expression that makes account-ability effective is far from simple. First, the range of principals and the agents to whom they are accountable is vast. Second, the mechanisms for eliciting accountability are often very complex. But there is a conceptual problem. There is a series of tensions internal to the concept of accountability. The various ingredients we associate with ac-countability: transparency, responsiveness, representativeness and so forth, may not harmonize with each other. Transparency is sometimes in tension with responsiveness and representation in tension with both. The crucial point is that harmonizing the different components of accountability cannot be done by conceptual fiat. It is an empirical matter addressed by institutional design and the concrete work of politics. The question is not: what is the concept of accountability? It is rather, how different states make tradeoffs between different components of accountability.

The Importance of Institutional Design

The Indian state secures legitimacy and is held accountable through a diverse range of institutions: executives, legislatures, courts, police, regulatory authorities, bureau-cracies, commissions of inquiry, independent statutory bodies, development agencies, and so on. Sometimes a broad-based ideological vision may impart to this myriad of interlocking institutions, laws and agencies a degree of coherence and semblance. But even under the most homogeneous of ideological constellations these institutions often compete with each other, set bounds on what other institutions can do, interpret directives in their own peculiar way and provide the structures of accountability. Nu-merous studies of political and economic development in India have long recognized the important role the state plays as an autonomous actor—that is, its capacities to often act free from societal constraints and manipulate them and its capacities to set the agenda for society. Nonetheless, with the exception of the literature on central banks and more recently on the judiciary, there is little systematic analytical work on India that examines the myriad of institutions, both formal and informal, the com-

mitments to procedures, the formal and informal incentives within state institutions, through which the state is both constituted and enabled to act on the one hand and constrained in its powers and capacities on the other.

Much of this neglect of the diversity of the institutions within the Indian state, the mechanisms by which they are held accountable, and the problems that arise from adverse incentives within institutions, has stemmed from certain methodological proclivities. In Marxist or structuralist inspired paradigms which dominated the political economy of the Indian state, the state was simply considered epiphenomenal to social forces. As such its own internal constitution, rules, incentives and procedures had at best marginal bearing on outcomes. Economic approaches to the state have paid more attention to the broad incentive structures that result from overextended and excessively dirigiste states, but for the most part its focus has been to demonstrate how the state has been captured by interest groups. The constitutive institutions of the state, particularly in poorer countries, remain, for the most part, a "black box." Relatively little attention has been paid to the relationship between institutional design and accountability.

For example, take the case of agents that enforce legal accountability. These include not only agencies of law enforcement such as the police, or the judiciary such as the courts, but also the investigative arms internal to bureaucracies and governments.

There is a general consensus in India that these institutions of accountability have underperformed. The Indian judiciary is a case in point. On the one hand, the judiciary has been extraordinarily active in calling the executive branch to account. The explosion of public interest litigation has meant that the judiciary is a conduit through which citizens make the executive accountable on a whole range of issues, such as health, sanitation, environment and social justice. But the overall effectiveness of the judiciary is very much open to question. For one thing, as the limitations of public interest litigation has demonstrated, the judiciary can at most provide immediate redress in a specific set of cases, but its power to generate enduring legislation that is widely enforced is extremely limited. But the main weakness of the judiciary has been its own institutional shortcomings, rather than its ability to sanction the executive branch. As the Malimath Committee noted, using data from India's courts, there were a staggering 28 million cases pending in 1996 (Mehta 2005). But most of the weaknesses are internal to the working of courts and a product of adverse incentive structures. There is wide variation in the management of case loads among different Chief Justices. Other factors influence the disposal rates of cases considerably: the extraordinary laxity in code of conduct of lawyers, the length of workday, norms of classification and allocation of cases among judges, the reliance on long oral arguments and procedures for taking witness depositions, provisions for appeals, the schedule of court fees, the structure of payments to lawyers can all have a vast impact on the performance of courts. All these measures, that were ostensibly designed to render the courts more transparent, have, by their cumulative effects, rendered them less responsive.

The effects of judicial delays are momentous. Delays mean that the use of "extrajudicial methods" to alter the stakes in a judicial dispute become more attractive, especially since these methods themselves are unlikely to be punished swiftly. The

more extrajudicial institutions such as system of patronage are resorted to as a means of resolving disputes, the more fairness, transparency and certainty are likely to be sacrificed. By and large the judicial system has, because of its own internal micro-dynamics, been unable to hold politicians accountable in an effective way. And politicians used to a system that protects them from punishment are more likely to weaken the judicial system. Indeed, it is arguable that judicial reform will be the lynch-pin of any effective accountability. The example here is meant to illustrate a simple point: the micro dynamics of individual institutions can have system wide effects on accountability.

Elections and Accountability

India is a robust and contentious parliamentary democracy. Elections are one of the principal mechanisms of sanctioning the conduct of politicians in a parliamentary democracy such as India and holding them accountable. But elections can often be a blunt instrument of accountability.

In order to hold governments accountable, voters must be able to assign clear responsibility for government performance. But the ability to assign clear responsibility can be limited in several ways. In the first instance, voters need information about how their representatives voted in parliament on a full range of issues. It is arguable that in India voters do not have or do not seek much of this information about representatives. The press and the public debate almost never carry detailed information about how members of parliament voted on particular bills or what legislation they introduced as private bills. In some respect, this lack of information is not as serious as might first appear, because in a parliamentary system each individual legislator's record is less important than the positions taken by the party. But even party manifestoes avoid cataloguing legislative accomplishment in any significant detail.

One particular aspect of the lack of information is particularly important in the Indian case. This has to do with the time horizons of the electorate by which they judge government performance. Ideally voters ought to be concerned about their welfare not only during the present term of the government but also the impact government decisions have on prospects of their future welfare. This requires that they make inferences about the impact policy is going to have on their future welfare. These inferences are notoriously difficult to make and theories of voting behavior have tried to wrestle with it.

In the case of India two things are very clear. First, the impact of policies on well-being is judged less by aggregate future expectations of the impact of policies. Notoriously, aggregate measures such as growth have seldom been political issues in India. Governments have routinely lost elections with high growth rates. Because of the dominance of the agrarian sector, aggregate measures of employment have not played a part. The one measure of well-being to which the Indian electorate is extremely sensitive is inflation, especially of essential commodities. This measure affects a large number of people, in a direct and transparent way, but it also indicates a preoccupation with present welfare rather than inter temporal gains.

This has a profound effect on the incentives this sets up for politicians. The time horizons under which politicians operate crucially determine policy outcomes. Politicians have less of an incentive to enact policies whose benefits are distant and uncertain. Most Indian politicians operate with short time horizons; this makes them risk averse in that they are not willing to sacrifice present constituencies for possible future gains, unless those accrue within the time horizon of the next election.

Second, for reasons that Hamilton pointed out in *Federalist* 70, accountability is very difficult to assign in cabinet executives. In circumstances where the lines of decision making are obscured, the questions of who is to be held accountable becomes notoriously difficult. The problem of assigning responsibility plagues the civil service as well. A large class of decisions is "collective" decisions within the civil service, in the sense that there are more than one signatories before a file can be approved. Often decisions are made by "committee" which makes accountability difficult. Ostensibly committees serve to prevent individual officers from acting arbitrarily. In practice, the large numbers of committees make civil servants dependent upon each other, in that they know they will require the cooperation of their colleagues on some future occasion. This leads them to sign on to decisions which they might not individually agree. In doing so, the decision is granted collective legitimacy which makes accountability difficult. The institutional mechanism by which the line between one civil servant and another is blurred makes accountability difficult (Das 1998). The management procedures and the incentive structures of the Indian Civil Service are such that individual responsibility is very difficult to establish. Indeed, as a general rule, Indian institutions do not have clear lines of authority, hence the lack of accountability.

Third, in principal voters must be able to vote out of office parties responsible for bad government. But the nature of the electoral system makes the connection between voter preference and government formation more indirect. For one thing, in a first past the post system, the number of seats that a party gets in parliament is not in direct proportion to the number of votes they receive; second, which parties form government is not a function of aggregate voter preference but of the way in which votes are distributed geographically; third, under conditions where no party is in the majority, the making and unmaking of governments is even less a direct consequence of voter choice. This has become more true of India in an era of coalition governments. In many instances, voters do not know what coalition a party is going to be part of once elected. Coalition governments blur the lines of responsibility even further. In instances where small parties are held responsible for arbitrarily breaking governments, their conduct is cashiered. But whether praise or blame can be assigned for policies is less clear.

Fourth, elections as a mechanism require that the opposition both closely monitor the government and inform the citizens. In principle, the opposition has incentives to monitor government and to inform voters about the performance of incumbents. Yet the existence of an opposition that can effectively articulate a critique of government cannot be taken for granted. In some instances smaller opposition parties can collude with government; in others, the opposition may be too deeply divided and preoccupied with internal fights to monitor incumbents. Such is now arguably the case with India's parliament. There is compelling evidence that both the quantity

and quality of deliberation in India's parliament has declined substantially in the last decade or so. As one commentator pointed out, opposition parties monitor only a very small range of issues and bills closely; legislation related to most departments passes virtually without debate or notice. One telling statistic about India's upper house of Parliament, The Rajya Sabha, is revealing in this respect. In 1985 this chamber of parliament spent a total of 791 hours discussing government bills; in 1996–97 this number was down to a mere seven hours (Mehta and Kapur 1998). There is virtual unanimity that Parliament has become ineffective in its monitoring functions.

Opposition parties face another dilemma. They cannot always oppose the government for they may be blamed for obstructing business; nor can they let the government get away with credit for enacting legislation. Opposition is effective when it neither colludes with nor obstructs the government. Arguably this dilemma is keenly pronounced in recent Indian parliaments. There are numerous examples of legislation that are held up in parliament because: a) either some small party that is part of the coalition government is exercising veto power; or b) many parties do not want legislation passed not because they disagree with the contents of the legislation but because they do not want the government to be able to garner credit for passing it. Given the fragmented character of parliamentary composition in India, the pace of legislation is extremely slow, even when there is substantive disagreement among the parties. For instance, a bill to liberalize insurance markets in India was first introduced in 1993 and took a full six years to pass (for details see Kapur 2000).

Beyond these large structural constraints, effective accountability depends upon how access to power is organized. While a complex topic, here I will gesture only at two blockages that prevent citizen access to decision making. The first is the lack of effective intra-party democracy. The key mechanism for organizing power in democracies is political parties and their structures can often mould the ways in which citizens express their aspirations. In India, political parties generally mediate citizen access in ways that impede accountability in a number of ways.

First, political parties in general are not transparent and deliberative forums. They do not educate their members in the issues and do not act as conduits of information for political activists. Whatever their other disadvantages, intra-party primaries have a profound educative function on the rank and file of voters. Election campaigns in India are relatively short and the lack of intra-party democracy implies that groundwork preparation is not done. Second, parties do not allow for the genuine preferences of voters to manifest themselves clearly. The criteria for candidate selection is non-transparent and uninstitutionlized. This often prevents key information about voter preferences from flowing up party conduits and prevents them from selecting candidates that are the most appropriate for particular locations. The net result is that parties can impede rather than enhance representation. Given the high cost of entry, parties have the power to restrict voter choices rather than expand them. Rather than being "institutions that knit the state and society together" (Kohli 1987) the lack of interparty democracy can help keep them apart. More subtle forms of accountability therefore require a pluralization of the sites of accountability and a greater expansion of the forums for deliberation. The great disjuncture in Indian democracy is that the

rules of political advancement within political parties are arbitrary and can circumvent accountability. Genuine intra-party democracy is an essential component of restoring accountability to this process.

Politics and the Unresolved Question of Accountability

The second great blockage remains the relationship between finance and politics. A reform of the ways in which elections are financed remains the single most difficult challenge for Indian democracy. The need to raise money for elections, combined with unrealistic, unworkable and unenforceable existing laws on campaign finance, produce profound distortions in the working of Indian democracy. At least some of the roots of corruption lie in the imperatives to raise finance in a context where the cost of elections is high, the legitimate rewards of office low, the chances of re-election uncertain, and the organizational effort required to mobilize voters is massive. The repercussions of the existing ways of collecting campaign finance are felt across all areas of public life.

Most democracies attempt to regulate election finance in four ways: they can limit political expenditures of parties; place limits on private donations and contributions; offer public funds for contesting elections; or they can introduce measures that bring about transparency in the process of generating funds. The idea behind the last measure is not so much to restrict fund-raising activities, as it is to provide information to the voters on who is raising money from whom.

But the challenge for the Indian state is that the widespread opaqueness of its financial system makes it difficult to monitor such financial flows. Arguably realistic campaign finance reform cannot be achieved unless whole sectors of its economy, such as real estate markets that generate "black money" and the system of taxation that more effectively scrutinizes the flow of money that makes elections possible, are reformed. But it is a vicious circle where India will not get reform of the state in part because of the need to generate rents to finance elections, and an unreformed state will continue to be ineffective in regulating election money.

State financing of elections has not been much tried in India. In almost all democracies, except the United States and United Kingdom, the proportion of public financing of elections has been consistently rising in relation to private funding. There are challenges to public funding however. It appears from comparative experience that public funding, ironically, works better in systems that are already effective and transparent to some degree. For public funding formulas to be effective, certain conditions have to be met. First, public funding must encourage rather than supplant private funding, because if seen as a substitute for private funding it becomes prohibitively expensive. Second, public funding should be fair and transparent. It should not be a means for already existing party oligarchies, which usually derive their power from their ability to raise funds, to strengthen their hold on parties. In short, public funding presumes that political parties are transparent, well run and considerably democratic in their internal workings. Most Indian political parties have no effective intra-party

democracy, and in the absence of serious reform in party structures, public funding is unlikely to yield good results. Third, one should not overestimate the degree to which public funding can be a panacea. Every single European country with public funding of elections, from Germany to Italy and Belgium, has continued to experience financial scandals relating to politics.

The fourth prong of regulation, transparency, has been very weak in India as well. Although party accounts are supposed to be audited regularly, these have proved to be an ineffectual check on party finances. Much of the recent effort by bodies such as the Supreme Court and the Election Commission has been to try and strengthen the disclosure requirements for political parties and candidates. Declaration of a candidate's assets, regular scrutiny of part accounts that require the disclosure of all donors who contribute more than 10 thousand rupees, and the filing of party tax returns are all steps in the right direction. A tax return is hardly the most reliable register of the true well-being of most Indians. Inducing transparency in election finance is parasitic upon the state being able to better regulate other non-electoral institutions that impinge upon election finance.

Any sensible strategy for regulating campaign finance will have to work on all four of these dimensions simultaneously and bring them together in sustainable, realistic and imaginative ways. But unless election finance is made into a serious issue, access to power and accountability will both be impeded. It is perhaps no accident that, as a recent study found, the average net worth of those who run for parliamentary elections in India is at least over Rs. 10 million (over $2 million); a testament to the fact that the political system remains inaccessible to the poor. Unless a genuine solution is found, money will continue to usurp politics, or in Gibbon's words, "corruption will remain the one infallible sign of our liberty."

Economic Policy, Public Action and Accountability

Probably the single most important puzzle at the heart of any study of accountability in India is why has India's record at poverty alleviation not been better? Why is there less pressure on the government to deliver a whole range of crucial services such as health and education? These two questions are analytically distinct: the first can more readily be explained by poor policy choice; the second demands closer scrutiny. These puzzles are compounded by the fact that an historic explanation for India's lack of failure in this respect does not hold. It suggested that either the poor do not vote, or some form of coercive or clientelist relationship prevents them from voting on their true preferences. In the case of India, where there is now reasonably disaggregated data available on voter turn outs, the picture is exactly the opposite of what this explanation hypothesizes. First, the incidence of coercion exercised by local elites in voting matters has decreased significantly and social relations have been politicized to the extent that old fashioned clientelist relations are difficult to sustain. Second, the poor in India have tended to vote more than the middle classes and the rich, rural turnouts are better than urban turnouts and, in recent years, lower and backward castes have voted more

than upper castes (Yadav 1997). Yet they have not been able to extend concerted public pressure in areas of health and education. One measure of this is captured in government spending statistics on health and education. In education, the central and state governments spent 4 percent of GDP for all levels of education in 1996–97 or 13.4 percent of total government expenditures, which is below the developing country average of 17.5 percent for all developing countries. India's public spending on health is very low: 1.2 percent of GDP, which places it among the lowest quintile of countries. There is wide variation among Indian states on these matters. State expenditures on education, for example, range from 3–7 percent of GSDP and from 16 to 29 percent as a share of total state expenditure. The reach of public criticism has been much less effective in Indian democracy when the deprivations people face fall short of the extreme hardships that say famines signify. The state's failures in these areas are well known. What is less well understood is the demand side of the equation. Why is political mobilization on *these* issues less effective? Can one just assume that this is simply a product of the *state's* failure or is there something about the structure and ideologies in civil society that impedes the formation of *effective demand* for health and education?

There are complex reasons for this phenomenon that will bear serious scrutiny. First, as with any claim with respect to India, there is wide regional variation in the mobilization for collective action on these issues. We would submit that, empirically, this is the least well understood area in Indian politics, and our understanding of the ways in which governments can be held more effectively accountable hinges on an answer to this question. The range of factors that influence the extent of collective action for the provision of public goods is complex. It has been shown, for instance, that the Indian states whose land distribution arrangements have historically displayed the greatest inequality also have low collective action for public goods (Dreze 1997; Kohli 1988). Two large North Indian states of U.P and Bihar both have the most inegalitarian land distributions and the greatest political apathy compared with the southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and so forth. The latter states historically had more egalitarian land tenure systems and were also the beneficiaries of more effective land distribution after independence. It appears that some degree of redistribution of assets is necessary before demands for public provision become more effective. The second key factor facilitating collective action for public goods seems to be the existence of a cadre-based party of the left that can facilitate mobilization on class lines as Kerala and West Bengal have had. These parties have been instrumental in both producing land reform and increasing public provision (Sen and Dreze 1998; Gazdar and Dreze 1998; Kohli 1988). Third, Indian states with a longer history of social mobilization, such as resistance to caste discrimination, are also more successful in collective action for the provision of public goods. Again, South India, which has had a much longer history of anti-upper caste movements compared with the North, provides good evidence for this point. It seems that anti-upper caste movements in the South were a precursor to more effective mobilization for tenancy rights, land reform and education (Menon 1992). It has been very clearly demonstrated that India's poor record in the provision of education and the abolition of child labor owes something to

the ritual stratification that caste produced (Weiner 1985), and a history of anti-caste movements seems to lead to better public provision in general. North India has only recently begun to experience such anti-caste movements and their outcomes are still indeterminate.

Perhaps this is an appropriate point to raise a question that needs further study in the Indian context. There is some evidence in the literature that, in terms of the relationship between class and ethnicity, the best results are obtained for the poor when mobilization along class and ethnicity coincide rather than clash. The former, termed "ranked ethnic systems" (Horowitz 1985), seem in democratic settings to produce the most effective forms of collective action for the poor. The distinction between ethnicity and class does not mark the politics of all societies but, in India, these have been seen as rival locus of mobilization. Ethnicity, in general, has been seen to be an easier locus of collective mobilization. Mobilization along class lines alone has on the whole been much less effective than instances where class and ethnicity have co-mingled. The Communist Party of Kerala was more successful because it was both an anti-upper caste movement and could draw upon a repertoire of caste symbols, as well as a class movement (Varshney 2005).

It is not the case that the exercise of franchise has not had a significant impact on economic policy and poverty alleviation programs. But the nature of this sort of accountability has to be studied more carefully. There are three ways in which that impact is visible. First, as Sen has very effectively argued, India's ability to avoid significant famines in post-independence era has largely been a function of demo-cratic pressures being brought to bear upon government. Second, in comparative terms, India's aversion to inflation has been attributed to the workings of electoral politics. Inflation has been the simplest measure of people's current well-being; its impact direct and widespread. Third, politicians have preferred what are known as "direct" methods of poverty alleviation. It has been shown that in the case of food and agricultural subsidies there is a very direct link between increases in subsidies and electoral cycles (Chibber 1999). Of course, direct methods of poverty alleviation are preferred for many other reasons. Direct monetary transfers are administratively easier to enact than long-term structural changes; they can be more easily targeted at the discretion of politicians. But, cumulatively, the kinds of pressures that have been brought to bear through the franchise suggest that immediate benefits are electorally more salient than long-time horizon changes.

Accountability and the Politics of Reform

What about dominant interest groups' ability to impede accountability? A traditional explanation of India's poor economic performance was precisely this: a tripartite col-lusion of rich farmers, public sector professionals and industrial capitalists exercised an effective lock over government policy. None of these classes was powerful enough to singly dominate the state, while their combined fears about the consequences of altering state policy meant that change was structurally inhibited (Bardhan 1985).

This powerful and influential explanation accounted for much stagnation in Indian economic policy. But this explanation has been less useful in thinking about the process through which India has, during the last decade, undertaken a serious economic liberalization program. Bardhan's explanation suffered from two weaknesses. First, it was too deterministic and underestimated the political room for maneuver possessed by political elites. Second, Bardhan failed to follow through on the implications of his own argument. Bardhan posed the following question: "why the dominant classes, who have so much to gain from long-term economic growth, do not pull together in their long-run collective interests and cooperate in dredging the stilted channels' of surplus mobilization and investment which were in danger of being overrun by patronage and subsidies?" His answer was that it was difficult to mount collective action in large and heterogeneous coalitions and hence elites took action to change the system in a way that would lead to their long-term interests. But the logic of this argument can also be turned on its head. This argument would also suggest that, when government does take action, it would be difficult to mount collective resistance against its policies. In other words, the very phenomenon that explained stagnation might also explain how government could, with artful maneuver, initiate change. Governments can initiate change and it is often difficult to mount resistance against it. They can exploit divisions between interests and take advantage of the ambiguities that surround the effects of policy to seize the initiative (Jenkins 2000).

But these changes can be taken only under certain conditions that underlie the character of policy making in India. First, the reform program has succeeded to the extent it has largely because it has been gradual and has noticeably involved a major public debate. Observers of parliamentary debates over reforms have noticed that most governments have not acknowledged they were undertaking radical action. A broad vision that underlies the reforms has seldom been argumentatively justified or explained to the public. In fact, the rhetoric of continuity is more pronounced than the acknowledgment of disjuncture. On the one hand, this makes the government's intentions less transparent to the public and, in that sense, renders it less directly accountable. On the other hand, by avoiding debates on ideological fundamentals, the government also avoids a potentially damaging polarization. This allows it, oddly enough, to be more *responsive*. Second, gradualism has allowed governments to avoid shocks. The one sense in which economic reforms can become an issue in mass politics is if they lead to a major shock to the economy. Indian politicians and policy makers have, by and large, been risk averse, in part because electoral compulsions force them to avoid policies that might potentially be experienced as a shock. It would be a fair to conclude that, in India's case, electoral accountability renders policy makers risk averse.

Third, policy makers are risk averse in another sense. Politicians are concerned less with the aggregate consequences of economic policy and more with the impact these have on their distributional coalitions. They like, in other words, to manage the distributional consequences of their policies. This does not mean they are averse to change. What it implies is that politicians will use policy to solidify new constituencies and raise resources from new sources before they go against the interests of old ones.

Therefore, the decisive determinant of reform in the Indian context is not whether the state is granted autonomy from social forces or whether key parts of the bureaucracy can be insulated from public pressure. The key question is whether policy makers can use policies to generate new groups that can sustain reform and devise creative compensatory schemes that can allow for divide and rule tactics to flourish. Neither structural constraints, nor open accountability, nor electoral pressures, but political creativity determines the nature of policy reforms in India (Sachs, Varshney and Bajpai 1999).

In Lieu of a Conclusion

This paper has highlighted different facets that go into making of a politics that is more accountable and responsive. In particular, it has emphasized that the norms and expectations citizens hold each other to, the design of institutions and the manner in which power is organized, all matter for accountability. But the paper is also a cautionary note against any quick fixes. Indeed, any purely administrative solutions that bypass the messy process of politics, are not likely to succeed or be enduring. The only alternative is creativity and improvisation that uses the small openings and incentives that entrenched structures provide and transforms them into virtuous cycles of hope. Just a cursory glance over institutional reform in India will throw up many moments where such reforms are possible. For instance, all the distortions in the representative process and the decline in legitimacy of institutions such as parliament provided an opportunity for nonelected institutions, such as the judiciary and India's independent election commission, to produce a measure of accountability. Most recently, the promulgation of a Right to Information Act has empowered citizens by giving them access to one crucial component of accountable government: information. In terms of economic reform, the Indian story is best described as one that involves creative disequilibrium. For instance, the state, for its own political economy reasons, facilitated the growth of a number of industrial groups, which in turn grew in ways that they could demand more reform of the regulatory system. Decentralization is taking place in slow and halting steps. Together, greater access to information, the devolution of power, and the rise of new regulatory systems have brought about incremental change. But fundamentally, the debate over decentralization and such reforms returns us to the question I started with: what conception of politics do we operate with? It seems to me that the fundamental issue in the decentralization debate is not technical institutional design but "trust." All the arguments used against decentralizing power—lack of capacity, local elite capture—are arguments that could equally be leveled against Indian democracy, and are essentially paternalistic. Imagine if our founding fathers had heeded the advice of European Social Theory against introducing universal suffrage based on these grounds. What we need is a similar "leap of faith." Decentralization will not be the panacea for all ills, but it has the potential for transforming the structure of politics, from a politics of identity to a politics of public goods. On some understandings China is more decentralized

because decentralization is a way of the centre shoring up its own legitimacy. But the conditions under which political systems devolve power downwards is an interesting question.

The list of incremental measures that have cumulatively had an impact is long. No equilibrium in a political system is so stable that reforms cannot take place. But the central point is that these come about because political and social entrepreneurs seize the moment, as it were; not because there is a predetermined policy template. This may make the reforms sound arduous, but then politics is nothing but "the slow boring of hard boards"—to use Weber's resonant phrase. While this chapter has dealt largely with the challenges of institutionalizing accountability, there are many experiments underway to empower citizens more effectively. For instance, the right to information, while not a panacea, will certainly help citizens monitor the delivery of social services better. But in the final analysis, accountability is only possible when the romance of a particular kind of politics is restored, a politics that recognizes that the good of citizenship is impossible without reciprocity. As India and China move forward, they will face many common challenges. But some think these common challenges are more economic than political. After all the question of what shape China's political system will take in the future remains uncertain. And India and China will have vastly different political systems. But perhaps if we take the representation, responsiveness framework some common *political* challenges also emerge.

As the Chinese thinker Qin Hui put it in a striking formulation:

What is excessive now is not liberalism or social democracy, but oligarchy and populism. It is therefore essential to critique both oligarchy from a liberal standpoint and populism from a social democratic standpoint.

When I read these words I wonder whether there can be any better formulation of the challenges for Indian democracy.

References

B a r d h a n, Pranap. 1985. *The Political Economy of Development in India*. Oxford: Blackwell.

C h i b b e r, Pradeep. 1999. *Democracy Without Associations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

D a s, S. K. 2001. *Public Office and Private Interest*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

D r e z e, Jean and S e n, Amartya. 1995. *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

D r e z e, Jean and G a z d a r, Haris. 1996. "Uttar Pradesh: The Burden of Inertia," in: J. Dreze and A. Sen (eds.), *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspective*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

G r e e n f e l d, Liah. 1992. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

G u h a, Ramachandra. 2007. *India after Ghandi*. New York: Ecco Press.

H o r o w i t z, Donald. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berekely: University of California Press.

J e n k i n s, Rob. 2000. *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

K a p u r, Devesh. 2000. "India: 1999," in: *Asian Survey*, January.

K a p u r, Devesh and M e h t a, Pratap B. 1998. "Parliament as an Institution of Accountability," Working Paper, UNRISD GENEVA.

K h i l n a n i, Sunil. 1997. *The Idea of India*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.

_____ (Ed.). 2005. *India's Public Institutions*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

K o h l i, Atul. 1987. *The State and Poverty in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ (Ed.). 1988. *India's Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

L i j p h a r t, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

M e h t a, Pratap B. 2003. *The Burden of Democracy*. Delhi: Penguin.

_____ . 2004. "The Constraints on Electoral Mobilization," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 51: 5399–03.

M e n o n, Dilip. 1992. *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

M o o r e, Barrington Jr. 1966. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press.

P r z e w o r s k i, Adam; A l v a r e z, Michael E.; C h e i b u b, Jose Antonio; L i m o n g i, Fernando (eds). 2000. *Democracy and Development; Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

R o u s s e a u, Jean J. [1756] 1997. *The Social Contract and Other Political Writings*, Victor Gourevitch (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

S a c h s, Jeffrey; V a r s h n e y, Ashutosh and B a j p a i, Nirupam (eds.). 1999. *India in the Era of Economic Reforms*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

V a r s h n e y, Ashutosh. 2005. "Democracy and Poverty," in: Deepa Narayan (ed.), *Measuring Empowerment*. Washington DC: The World Bank.

W e i n e r, Myron. 1995. *The Child and State in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Y a d a v, Y. 1999. "Politics," in: M. Bouton and P. Oldenburg (eds.), *India Briefing*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Biographical Note: Pratap Bhanu Mehta (Ph.D.), is currently the President, Centre for Policy Research Delhi. He previously taught political theory at Harvard University and has published widely in political theory and Indian politics. His recent publications include *The Burden of Democracy* and *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India* (co-edited with Niraja Jayal). He is the recipient of the Infosys Prize and the Malcom S. Adhisehiah Prize for Social Sciences.

Address: E-mail: pratapbmehta@yahoo.co.in