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**Redrawing the Body Politic: Federalism, Regionalism and the Creation of New States in India.**

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**Redrawing the Body Politic: Federalism, Regionalism and the Creation of New States in India.**

*In 2000 the federal map of India was redrawn to create three new States, signifying a significant shift in the attitude of many of India's major political parties towards territorial reorganisation. This paper suggests that a new era in the political economy of India – associated with economic liberalisation; the rise of the Hindu Right; the regionalisation of politics; and the emergence of a coalitional system of government in New Delhi – provides a new 'field of opportunities' for regions demanding State recognition. The paper concludes that, in this matter, the major political parties are primarily by expediency and opportunism rather than, as is claimed, by an evaluation of the democratic and developmental potential of smaller States.*

INTRODUCTION

The nature of India's federalism is central to any understanding of its political economy (Corbridge, 1995). Analyses of federalism in India have tended to focus on its Constitutional provisions; the changing political economy of Centre-State relations; and the challenges to the state's federalist claims, evinced most clearly in the secessionist movements in Punjab, Kashmir and the North East. This paper addresses a subject which has taken a rather lower profile over the years - the creation of new federal States *within* the Union of India.

In 2000 the internal map of India was redrawn to create three new States - Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh (see map). The formation of these States is interesting because historically the major political parties have tended to oppose the formation of new States in India.[1] Unlike Nigeria, which has a history of strategically dividing and expanding the number of its federal units (Dent, 1995), changes to India's internal political-administrative boundaries over the last fifty years have usually been conceded only after considerable struggle. Successive central Governments have tended to view assertions of regional identity with suspicion, and to stigmatise them as parochial, chauvinist and even anti-national (Oommen, 1990a). The reasons for this include the traumatic legacy of the Partition in 1947; the concern that India might disintegrate under the weight of its divided colonial history; and its sheer ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural plurality. Although alterations and additions to India's States have been made over the past fifty years, until recently New Delhi has tended to sanction these border changes only reluctantly, and neither did such movements and demands tend to receive national-level support from opposition parties. Thus the political map of India today remains dominated by populous, geographically vast, and culturally heterogeneous 'mega-States' like Uttar Pradesh, which, with over 160 million people, is demographically bigger than many large countries (see Arora and Verney, 1992, for a comparative perspective).

The creation of these new States marks a departure in political attitudes at the Centre in two main ways. First, rather than resisting the demands for new States, many of the major political actors at the Centre (recent Governments, their coalition parties and opposition parties) supported some or all of the regional movements. This support was often both fickle and flimsy - a change in the political equation in one of the areas under discussion would see a reversal of interest, foot-dragging or even an apparent change of heart on the issue. There were also discrepancies on the issue between different levels and units of particular parties.[2] But the degree and consistency of support is in some ways irrelevant. What is important here is the fact that territorial change has become a 'permissable' issue for party agendas – debates over territorial reorganisation have re-entered 'mainstream' political discussion in the mid-/late 1990s. The second point of departure is that these new States were

proposed on the grounds of administrative efficiency rather than on the language principle that has, ostensibly, guided State formation the past (Brass, 1994; King, 1997). This too marks a shift in India's federal ideology, as regional identity, culture and geographical difference would now appear to be recognised as a valid basis for administrative division and political representation. As we shall see below, this distinction between past and present is fuzzier than suggested here, but there has undoubtedly been a qualitative shift in the attitude towards new States amongst the large political parties at the Centre.

This paper does not look at individual regional mobilisations, or their outcomes in specific areas – although this line of inquiry does potentially offer important insights into a whole range of issues around governance, state and civil society.[3] Rather this paper is concerned with exploring the relationship between the shift in attitudes in New Delhi to the issue of new States, and the changing political economy of India. If a broad 'periodisation' of post-Independence India's political economy can be charted, then it would seem clear that a third 'era' is underway, following on from the Nehruvian years, and then the Indira/decline of Congress period (see Yadav, 1999). This new period is broadly marked by the post-1991 liberalisation of the economy, the meteoric rise of the Hindu Right, and a shift from one-party dominance of the Centre to the emergence of a relatively stable *system* of coalition government (if much less so a stability of the coalitions themselves). Related to this is the 'regionalisation of politics', whereby smaller regional and State-specific parties have come to exert more power not just in the States themselves (in government, or as partners of 'national' parties), but also in the national parliament itself (Saez, 2002). Recent national-level debates and decisions about territorial reorganisation provide a way of exploring these shifts.

The paper starts with a short history of territorial reordering in independent India, and outlines some of the colonial legacies and postcolonial imperatives that guided this process. Section III outlines the popular and political debates on the creation of new States, and Section IV then sets the issue within broader trends within India's changing political economy. Section V provides a final discussion of the argument being made in the paper.

## THE MAP OF STATES: INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER

In the months preceding Independence and the first formative years after it, India's leaders faced an enormously complex task in the construction of both state and nation. One decision about which there was little or no alternative was the political form India should take. Jalal (1995) argues that federalism was less of a choice than a necessity given the country's vast size and diversity and its history of repeated colonisation. In theory federalism allows for both unity and diversity, although in practice it includes a wide range of possibilities in its ideology and arrangements (Smith, 1995). India's Constitution is generally recognised to significantly favour an economically and politically strong Union Government vis-à-vis the States (Dua, 1979; Dandekar, 1987; Brass, 1994), a classic outcome in a postcolonial polity, and with particular reason for India (see below). A second closely related decision that the leadership faced in 1947 concerned the demarcation of the States - the size, shape and composition of its political-administrative units. The patchwork of political units left by the British was the result of:

> [A] process of annexation, and on the basis of strategic and political considerations rather than on any rational basis ... [T]he infra-structure of the polity that we inherited in 1947 was a confused mosaic created by a foreign

imperial power unmindful of the valid basis for the territorial organisation of the sub-continent. (Khan, 1992:39).

The issue of the 560-plus 'Princely States' further complicated the matter. These were made up of extraordinary variety of political units that enjoyed quasi-autonomous status under colonial authority, and comprised about 45 per cent of pre-Partition Indian territory. They ranged from States like Hyderabad, with an area of 80,000 miles[2] and a population of 18 million, to 'States' like Varnoli Nana in Western India which had an area of 1 mile[2] and a population of 96 at Independence (Spate *et al*, 1971). Moreover, many of the Princely States were extremely fragmented. Baroda, one of the bigger States, was divided between four or five large non-contiguous areas and about thirty smaller parts. Spate *et al* (1971:164) suggest that:

> [T]he boundaries of the old regime were often arbitrary, the old Princely States in particular for the most part having neither rhyme or reason but owing their fantastic assortment of sizes and shapes to historical accidents not always of an edifying kind.

The Indian National Congress (INC) had supported the idea of reorganising the States along a more rational basis as far back as 1905, and it was decided that conformity with the distribution of the major languages was the most sensible way of achieving this (King, 1997). The linguistic redistribution of the provinces was confirmed as a clear political objective in 1920 at the Nagpur Conference, and again in 1928 in the Report of the Nehru Committee of the All Parties Conference (Khan, 1992:43). It was believed that linguistic States would encourage greater administrative efficiency, political cohesion and economic development than the existing mosaic of multi-lingual States and Provinces. But after Independence, it became clear that Nehru, Patel nor Gandhi were keen on these changes (Vanhanen, 1992), and together with the amalgamation of the Princely States, pre-existing territorial divisions were broadly retained. When he was reminded about his earlier commitment to reorganisation, Nehru admitted that he was 'never very enthusiastic about linguistic provinces' (quoted in Das Gupta, 1988:148).

Nehru was concerned that the division of India into linguistic States would encourage the development of 'sub-nationalities', which might in turn come to demand their own separate sovereign states (King, 1997). The 1948 Linguistic Provinces Commission of the Constituent Assembly (the Dar Commission) affirmed this view, and warned of the dangers to Indian unity posed by the creation of linguistic provinces (Government of India, 1949; Brass, 1966). Moore (1982) suggests that the confusion, changes and political battles that preceded the hasty British departure from India all contributed to a climate of uncertainty and concern about its potential disintegration. Four events, circumstances and historical conditions contributed to this concern, and were profoundly significant in shaping both the territorial map of States and the highly centralised Constitution:

i) The bloody events and communal nightmare that accompanied Partition. Hundreds of thousands died and millions were displaced, deeply traumatising the infant nation-state(s). The fear/threat of further dismemberment became highly formative in determining the Indian national leadership's early responses to questions of regional autonomy (Banerjee, 1989).

ii) The challenge of integrating the Princely States. As late as May 1947 Nehru protested to Mountbatten that British plans to let the Crown's paramountcy over the Princely States lapse with Independence (rather than transferring paramountcy to the

new sovereign authority), would result in the 'balkanisation' of India (Mukarji, 1995). A bargain was eventually struck whereby India accepted Dominion status in return for British assistance in bringing the Princely States to heel. Jalal (1995) suggests that the horrors of Partition sobered and quieted the 'potentially more explosive' issue of provincial autonomy, and the Princely States were integrated into the Indian Union within the remarkably short space of time of two years (Verma, 1994). Rulers were told that they had only to delegate defence, foreign affairs and communications to the Centre, but once they acceded the Centre gradually assumed more extensive powers (see Menon, 1956).

iii) The modernising and nation-building aspirations of many in the Indian National Congress, later the Congress Party. Nehru, exemplified this outlook, believing profoundly in the overarching cultural and societal unity of India, and the vision of India's destiny as a modern sovereign nation-state (Nehru, 1946; Mookerjee, 1954). The struggle for Independence was seen by Nehru and many other nationalists as a critical period of 'nation-in-the-making' through the forging of a *modern* national consciousness, and they were concerned that the reactionary forces of ethnicity, language, religion and regional culture would hinder this process, or even prevail.

iv) The sheer cultural, linguistic, ethnic, geographical and religious diversity of India, which encouraged anxieties that this "mere geographical expression" (Seeley, 1883:92), might disintegrate. Despite Nehru's convictions about the unity of India, he was painfully aware that it had never before been united under one political authority.

It should be noted that Article 3 of the Constitution did make provision for a future States reorganisation, and one commentator has suggested that the initial lack of change was the result of other more pressing commitments for the new Government than any intransigence on Nehru's part (Vanhanen, 1992:70). King (1997) also offers a positive reading of the way in which Nehru handled the issue of territorial reorganisation issue during the first critical years of independence. Nevertheless, the map of India that emerged in 1947 was a clumsy division of Class 'A' States, which were made up of the former British Provinces, such as Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar; Class 'B' States, which were made up of former large Princely States and large amalgamated Unions of States, such as Hyderabad, Mysore and Rajasthan; and Class 'C' States, which were those formed out of smaller Princely States, such as Bhopal, Delhi and Vindhya Pradesh. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not come under this system, and were administered directly from the Centre (Menon, 1956). As Sukhwal (1985) notes, '[T]he boundaries formed after the integration of princely states and former British provinces were economically, administratively, linguistically and culturally illogical' (quoted in Vanhanen, 1992:70).

By the early 1950s, it was clear that State politicians, regional elites and, in some cases, ordinary people wanted change, and specifically the creation of States which would reflect linguistic and cultural patterns and differences. The Centre was finally forced to concede in 1953 following protests and riots in Madras, and the fast to death of a prominent Gandhian leader (Spear, 1965). Madras was divided between Andhra Pradesh for Telugu speakers, and Tamil Nadu for Tamil speakers (in both States there remained, of course, other minority languages). It was clear that the issue of State boundaries required a more comprehensive policy study, and in the same year the Government set up a States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) to look into the matter of territorial reorganisation. The four principles guiding the Commissioners were (a) the preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of India, (b) linguistic and cultural homogeneity, (c) financial, economic and administrative considerations, and (d) the successful working of the Five Year Plans (Narain, 1977).

The States Reorganisation Report that followed two years later proposed that India's unity would be enhanced, not compromised, by the greater recognition and protection of its regional languages and cultures (Government of India, 1955:45). Many of its recommendations were implemented in 1956 States Reorganisation Act, leading to the redrawing of territorial boundaries to form more linguistically homogenous States, particularly in the South. Although language was the main criterion, other factors played a tacit part in these decisions, including regional culture, economic viability and religion (Khan, 1977). But even as Nehru partially conceded the formation of linguistic States, he tried to mitigate the effects they might have on fanning sub-national sentiments by setting up five Zonal Councils (North, South, East, West and Central).[4] These Councils, each of which included several States, were expected to act "as a corrective to the over-emphasis upon sectional and linguistic loyalties, [and were] an effort to establish values transcending language and religion" (Bondurant, 1958:146). However, they were only given advisory roles, and failed to develop into significant political institutions (Thakur, 1995).

The 1956 reorganisation reduced the number of States in India from twenty-seven to fourteen (plus six centrally-administered territories), many of which were geographically huge and extremely heterogeneous.[5] Some thought that the size and diversity of these States would prove inimical to their development. KM Pannikar, for example, one of the three States' Reorganisation Commissioners, included a note of dissent on Uttar Pradesh (UP) in an appendix to the 1955 Report. He argued that UP should be divided as its sheer size would hinder administrative efficiency and development. He was also concerned that this enormous State, with by far the largest number of representatives in the national parliament, would exert an undue influence on central politics (Government of India, 1955). Pannikar was opposed by Nehru and other senior politicians in Delhi and in UP itself, who for various reasons wanted the State to remain undivided, and who claimed to place their faith in the efficacy of planning. Development planners were expected to be able to take the geographical, cultural and remaining linguistic diversity of the large States into consideration and deal with it. It was also a period of optimism (amongst the elite anyway) with regard to the notion of *political* rationality and neutrality (see Kaviraj, 1991). Although corruption, nepotism and overt caste and regional loyalties were present, they were not as entrenched or endemic as in later years.

But while Nehru may have hoped that these changes had satisfied the demand for territorial reordering, struggles continued in and across a number of States. In 1960, the bilingual Province of Bombay was divided into the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat after violent language riots. Demands for a Punjab State were also resisted at first because they were perceived as being *religiously* (Sikh) motivated. Brass (1994) suggests that only after a leader was elected in whom Delhi leaders could place their trust was a State of Punjab conceded, ostensibly on *linguistic* grounds. Accordingly, in 1966 'greater Punjab' was split between Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh (although the latter did not receive full State recognition until 1971). Oommen (1990b) has argued that in substance this amounted to the acceptance of religion as a valid basis for State formation. Several new States have since been created in the North-East of India, and it would appear that ethnicity also has been granted recognition as an 'informally valid' basis for political-administrative reorganisation under certain circumstances. Meghalaya was accorded Statehood in 1971, Manipur and Tripura in 1972, and Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram became States in 1986. Oommen (1990b) suggests that their 'geopolitical resource' of being border areas helped them achieve Statehood, although the years of fierce insurgency probably contributed to their success (Mukarji, 1995). Goa upgraded from Union Territory status to a State in 1985, and Delhi in 1998.[6]

In the last two years there has been another wave of State creation, in the shape of Uttaranchal,[7] Jharkhand[8] and Chhattisgarh[9]. Each of the three areas is economically 'backward' (in official and popular jargon), and each shared a sense of injustice about their regional exploitation by the States of which they were previously a part (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh respectively). All three areas are also, to a degree, ethno-culturally marginal: Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh because of their relatively large *adivasi* (tribal) populations, and Uttaranchal because of its *pahari* (mountain) geography and identity. But there are also considerable differences between the three regions, particularly in terms of the histories of their regional identities; the many divisions and differences *within* each region; the vocabularies and strategies of protest they have employed; and their relationships with the different political parties, respective State Governments and the Centre. Thus, it must be emphasised that each of the regions and demands are unique, and each requires careful individual study. Nevertheless, despite their differences, these respective regional mobilisations can also be analysed within a broader set of changes within India's political economy, which are the subject of this paper.

## THEORISING THE RECENT TERRITORIAL REORGANISATION IN INDIA

How has the Central Government's decision to create these new States been received in India? One response is that it represents a lurch towards the balkanisation of the country, as it will open a Pandora's Box of regional demands which may ultimately result in the disintegration of India. Nehru feared this possibility, and it formed the centre of Selig Harrison's dire warning that the linguistic States represented a dangerous encouragement to secessionist forces (Harrison, 1960, 1963; see also De, 1966; Dikshit, 1975). The global surge of ethno-nationalist conflict in the 1980s and 1990s and the tragic example of Yugoslavia have served to rekindle these fears (Deccan Herald, 2 April 1998). An (un-named) 'former Chief Minister of Bihar', for example, was quoted as saying, 'Divisions of Bihar will jeopardise national and regional interests and affect national unity and integrity besides encouraging separatist and extremist forces' (Times of India, 16 September 1998).

However, although a subject of debate, and a concern for many, this view is less influential than in previous years, and there are a number of reasons to reject the prognosis of India's disintegration. First, to take the example of the three new States, although the struggle in Jharkhand was often violent, and the demand for Statehood in Uttaranchal was intense, the decision to make the Chhattisgarh region into a State was certainly not the act of a reluctant Government succumbing to overwhelming popular protest and pressure. Indeed, a popular movement for a Chhattisgarh States seems to have been extremely muted, and the Central Government (BJP-led at the time) obviously did not envisage the creation of this or the other two States as representing a threat to India's unity. The experience of fifty years of Independence as a sovereign 'nation-state', during which crises in Punjab, Kashmir and the North East have been weathered (if not always best or finally resolved), has perhaps engendered more security and confidence in India's continued unity amongst many policy makers.

Second, none of the regional movements in Uttaranchal, Jharkhand or Chhattisgarh displayed any serious separatist intent, and with the exception of certain struggles in the North East (such as Bodoland, which has a moderate group seeking Statehood and a more extreme group demanding secession), neither do most of the other contemporary regional movements in India. In the future, of course, all or part of a particular movement could come to embrace secessionist demands, but this seems unlikely. These mobilisations have been for the most part directed against their

respective State Governments, which were/are usually identified as the primary site of neglect, oppression and/or internal colonialism, rather than the Central Government. As Brass (1994) notes, regional groups are pushing for greater *access* to political power and control over the Government purse, not cultural or linguistic separation (see also Narain, 1977). This is not to say that the movements for greater territorial autonomy in other regions will not be encouraged. Following the 1998 announcement, for example, there have been demands for a State of Kodagu, currently a part of Karnataka, (Deccan Herald, 31 August 1997), and from various ethnic groups in the North East (Deccan Herald, 2 April 1998). Two new political parties in Andhra Pradesh, both established in 1997, have made Statehood for the Telengana region their main electoral plank (Deccan Herald, 16 December 1997), while there have been increased stirrings of regional demands in Bundelkhand, Vidharba, eastern and western Uttar Pradesh, the Vindhya region and elsewhere. But although they will require careful handling, these regional demands need not necessarily be pernicious to the unity of India - a claim which leads us on to the second major theory concerning territorial reorganisation.

A number of commentators have argued that the Indian polity is not sufficiently decentralised given the plural nature of India's society, culture and political past, and it could be suggested that the creation of smaller States would be ones means of achieving this. Paul Brass (1982) has famously argued that the centralising drives of the state have in fact worsened regional and other societal tensions, rather than contained or managed them. He suggests that the centralisation of power, decision-making and control of resources in one of the world's most culturally diverse and socially fragmented countries has had unintended results. These include the erosion of the effectiveness of some political organisations; the declining ability of the Central Government to implement development Plans in the States and localities; and the heightening of ethnic, religious, caste and other regional and cultural conflicts. In a new era of liberalisation, these pressures have only increased. States are now permitted to engage directly with external donor and corporate interests (from the World Bank to multi-national corporations), and there is growing evidence of the regionally uneven impact that such policies are having, within States as well as between them (Kennedy, 2000; Bajpai and Sachs, 1999; Ahluwalia, 2000; Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; Nagaraj, 2000). States now have far more agency in negotiating their economic futures, and some are avidly pursuing a global identity and position. Liberalisation has opened up new political avenues of wealth creation, particularly for certain regions and sectional interests (Jenkins, 1999)

The 'over-centralisation thesis' has led many commentators to suggest that administrative, territorial and political decentralisation would *strengthen* the nation-state of India, not, as many at the Centre fear, weaken it (Kothari, 1989). The debates on how to achieve this have focussed on strengthening and supporting local democratic institutions (notably the village panchayats and municipal councils), Constitutional reform (such as devolving more power to the States) and encouraging greater political and bureaucratic transparency and accountability. But some commentators, notably Rasheeduddin Khan, have added to this another possibility: the major reorganisation of India's constituent units in order to encourage a more genuinely plural, decentralised and democratic nation-state (Khan, 1977, 1992). In his 'manifesto for change from the present centralised, dysfunctional, anachronistic union system' to an 'equipoised, co-operative and contemporary federalism', Khan argues that India needs to return to 'socio-cultural ecology' as the basis for political-administrative organisation. Territorial reorganisation is one of the measures required in order to transform the large, administratively unwieldy, politically troublesome and economically uneven States into a more 'rational' map of States based upon economic viability, socio-cultural homogeneity and political and administrative

manageability. Khan actually proposes that India be made up of over 50 States. A number of other senior political commentators are sympathetic to this broad argument (if not, perhaps, to Khan's suggestion). Rajni Kothari, for example, suggests that:

> A large part of such assertions [of ethnic identities demanding more autonomous spaces for themselves] need to be considered as natural concomitants of the democratic struggle for achieving a more participant and decentralised polity and economy (Kothari, 1989:13).

Kothari believes that analyses of India's federal structure and processes have for too long been dominated by accounts of the workings of the Union and its constituent units. He strongly suggests that we must go beyond these Centre-State debates, which can present a sterile and overly 'mechanistic' view of federalism, and move towards an analysis of the more fundamental dialectic between the state and society. This is supported by a more 'organic' view of federalism which would argue that Indian society is itself federal, and locates the weakness of the system in the poor politicising of that federalism. From this perspective, the regional movements of post-colonial India can be seen as one expression of the increasing political engagement of different, and often marginal, social groups, who are demanding a more participatory and decentralised polity. Both Rasheeduddin Khan and Rajni Kothari recognise, as Graham Smith argues, that 'there is no basis in political theory for claiming that smaller territorial units are necessarily more hospitable to democratic politics' (Smith, 1996:398). Neither are smaller territorial units necessarily going to be more administratively efficient or 'developmentally' effective. But there is much that is positive and plausible in the arguments for smaller States, both for the specific regions under review, and even, arguably, as an agenda for a second States reorganisation. Many of the current States of India are administrative leviathans, and the sheer physical distance ordinary people, politicians and government officials have to cover can act to alienate groups and regions, and hinder sensitive or well-managed development planning and initiatives. Smaller States may well provide a more propitious environment for more manageable administrative loads; greater understanding of and commitment to the local region; and more proximity between people and political and institutional centres of power.

However, there are a number of problems with this agenda for a more 'rationally' organised map of India. First, under present administrative and government structures, the new States would require an expensive multiplication of capitals, Assemblies (State parliaments), Ministries, Courts and other accoutrements of government. The ideal scenario would envisage that the reorganised States would facilitate enhanced economic growth through more effective and efficient development measures - an expectation that is by no means assured. Second, in terms of democratic functioning, these regional mobilisations, like other social movements, can mask partial and elite interests and manipulations, even, or especially, in marginal areas. Again there can be no automatic assumption that a new State would lead to greater social or political justice. A third problem concerns the impact that the creation of smaller, more culturally and linguistically homogenous States might have on fanning regional or ethnic chauvinism. India has a long history of 'sons of the soil' movements, which although diverse in form and nature, usually aim at the exclusion of 'outsiders' from the State/region through expulsion, or privileging the 'native' population through the setting up of a system of preferential politics to guarantee their 'rights' to employment, land and political power (Weiner, 1978; Das Gupta, 1988). None of these problems are inevitable or inexorable, and the various outcomes of territorial reorganisation would be highly place specific and context-dependent. However, these general concerns suggest caution must be exercised.

The BJP-led Government which oversaw the creation of the latest three States offered the public little detail on its reasons for their decision beyond rather vague references to administrative efficiency and improved democratic transparency and responsibility. In March 1998, for example, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was quoted as being, 'of the view that the formation of these three States was necessary for the proper development of these areas' (Deccan Herald, 31 March 1998). L.K. Advani, the Home Minister, stated that in general he favoured smaller States in the interests of growth and development: 'The rationale behind this decision was the administrative problems created because of the very large size of the States of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh' (Times of India, 11 June 1998). But despite the political rhetoric, the evidence suggests that most parties are not motivated primarily by the developmental and democratic merits (or demerits, in the case of opponents) of greater federal decentralisation, but by considerations of short term political expediency. In some cases, the electoral benefits that might accrue to the parties over this issue seem to have outweighed any consideration of the financial, social or political viability of the States. With regard to Chhattisgarh, for example, it has been suggested that:

> Nothing except electoral arithmetic seems to have prompted the entire spectrum of political parties relevant to Madhya Pradesh to support the formation of a separate Chhattisgarh State ... privately the leaders of almost all parties admit that the move is devoid of any logic and could prove detrimental to both the States  (Deccan Herald, 10 September 1998).

In the next section this relationship between political opportunism and the creation of new States is taken up in detail, and is situated within broader changes in the Indian political landscape.

THE CHANGING POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INDIA

In the mid-1960s there was something of a 'sea change' in India's political economy, marking a shift from what Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) have termed 'command' to 'demand politics'. One of the best studies of this widely identified transition is Atul Kohli's (1990) exploration of India's 'growing crisis of governability'. Kohli refers to the increasing 'strain' that has emerged in the Indian polity since the mid-1960s, demonstrated in the absence of enduring coalitions, a growing political ineffectiveness in dealing with important problems, and an inability to accommodate growing political conflict (including regional demands) without resorting to force and violence. These are argued to be the products of uncontrolled politicisation within both the state and civil society, which has resulted in the incapacity of the state to "simultaneously promote development and to accommodate diverse interests" (Kohli, 1990:14).

Kohli contends that the roots of India's governability problem are political rather than socio-economic, with a highly interventionist state attempting to deal with a poor economy and in the process becoming the object of intense political competition. He traces the success and hegemony of the Congress Party prior to the mid-1960s to its strong party organisation (especially at the District level), its adaptive qualities, and the positive role that access to patronage resources played in building electoral support (often organised through 'traditional' vote banks). Congress also benefited from the charismatic leadership of Nehru, from the prestige and legitimacy it had won during the independence struggle, from a lack of any effective opposition, and from a favourable international economy that aided steady economic growth. But by the early 1970s major changes were clearly under way, signalled by the decline of India's

institutions, and especially the Congress Party. Kohli associates this with Indira Gandhi's decision to rule and maintain power through populism - a strategy that, he suggests, was inherently destabilising. Power became more and more concentrated in the person of Mrs. Gandhi and in the primacy of New Delhi over the States, for example through the initiation of the procedure of direct appointment from above rather than by election from below, and the constant intervention in State politics.

Although Kohli uses this familiar 'Nehru good/Indira bad' format in analysing changes in the Indian polity, he avoids, as Corbridge (1995) notes, the temptation to stylise the different periods too personally. Nehru could afford to keep a lighter hand on the reins during the period of Congress hegemony, but by the time Mrs. Gandhi came to power, serious opposition had arisen at both the State and national level, and Kohli draws out some of the events and processes of the 1960s and 1970s that prompted Mrs. Gandhi's 'strategy' of personalised rule.[10] The Indo-Chinese war in 1962 saw the Chinese cross the Indo-Tibet border with impunity, badly shaking India's confidence in itself and in its Armed Forces. Nehru's death in 1964, calamitous monsoon failures between 1965 and 1967, and the suspension of planning from 1966 to 1969 added to the erosion of early post-Independence optimism. The latter was part of a wider crisis in the Indian economy during Indira Gandhi's premiership, as it fell prey to some of the contradictions of a capital goods-based import substitution strategy. Suffocated by the mammoth bureaucracy that the complex planning and licensing system had engendered, the economy slowed down (Ahluwalia, 1985; Bhagwati, 1993; Lewis, 1995).[11] The growing power of the dominant proprietary classes vis-à-vis the Central Government further impaired the economy's ability to function efficiently, as savings vital to sustain capital investment in industry were withheld (Bardhan, 1984). Meanwhile the international economy was also tightening following the 1973/4 and 1978/9 oil crises, compounding internal difficulties.

Given this situation, Congress was increasingly forced to 'buy' votes with the adoption of social programmes for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and through various loans, concessions and benefits for other social groups such as farmers and students. The costs of these programmes could only be met by deficit financing, contributing to the growing fiscal crisis of the 1980s. This further politicised the regional policies of New Delhi and of the State Governments, as different regions and social groups competed for scarce resources. Mrs. Gandhi tried to maintain her authority by destabilising hostile State governments and through an even more concentrated personalisation of rule ('India is Indira and Indira is India' was a celebrated slogan, coined in 1976 by the then Congress President, Dev Kanta Barooah). In an atmosphere of growing paranoia, many Congress candidates were selected on the basis of their personal loyalty, not their aptitude, political experience or skill, and Indira Gandhi increasingly fell back on direct, populist campaigns, by-passing the (by now) largely defunct Congress organisation.

Kohli points to the continuing institutional decline that marks Congress and the wider Indian polity, and the growing mobilisation of various social and economic groups, including the intense regional and ethnic activism of the 1980s and 1990s. Closely related to this is one of the most important political trends of the last twenty years - the growth in the number and success of various regional parties taking power in individual States (or two or three at most) all over India (Datta, 1994). These parties do not, or cannot, realistically aspire to national power, but they have come to exert an increasingly powerful role in the national polity in their position as allies of the larger parties (Saez, 2002).

However, for some time in the early 1990s, it looked as if the Bharatiya Janata Party might break this trend. As the party political expression of the Hindu Right, the BJP experienced a phenomenal rise in support over the 1980s and 1990s, and it has

emerged as the biggest single-party opponent to Congress and the other smaller 'secular' left wing parties (Jaffrelot, 1993; Hansen, 1999). Compared to the other major parties it has a well-established internal structure through its hierarchy of local, State and national organisations, and unlike many of its political opponents, the BJP appears to articulate a powerful and coherent vision of and for India, centring on the notion of 'Hindutva' - a Hindu nation-state. The unity of the *Hindu* body politic, and its masculine aggressiveness, have been signalled, for example, in the highly symbolic *yatras* or processions around India, and in the testing of the nuclear bombs in Pokhran in 1998 (Van der Veer, 1994; Corbridge, 1999).

But a number of factors have worked against the BJP's particular vision of national unity, and may well be decisive in preventing the party from achieving undisputed political and ideological hegemony. These include the deep roots of secularism, and the left-wing and low caste backlash that the BJP's rise to power has provoked (Hassan, 1998; Lerche, 1998). The emergence and strengthening of lower and Backward caste parties (especially in the north) over the 1990s, and the well-recorded rise of regional parties all over India have increased political competition for the BJP, while although much depleted and weakened, the Congress Party is not yet spent, and at this time still forms the second largest single party in Parliament. Another problem for the BJP is the cultural and religious diversity within India. The Hindu vision espoused by the BJP and its non-political associates does not just alienate many amongst the non-Hindu population (such as Christians, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, animists and Buddhists, and arguably the Scheduled Castes, or former Untouchables), but even amongst Hindus it is more often more regionally than nationally salient or attractive (Manor, 1998; Chiriyankandath, 1998; Corbridge, 1999). For these reasons, amongst others, although the BJP's 1998 election campaign was marked by considerably more moderation than in 1991 and 1996, the party still only won 179 Parliamentary seats out of a total of 543. Because of these electoral weaknesses, by 1999 the BJP remained in the uncomfortable and unstable position of heading up a weak coalition government in alliance with a number of fractious and sometimes dangerously disruptive regional parties (notably the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu under Jayalalitha). In the elections of September-October 1999 the BJP won more seats, but they remained vulnerable to pressure from coalition partners, and overall the leverage of regional parties in national government is evident.

This has resulted in a situation in which few seats either way can determine who rules in some of the States, and given the delicate balance in the Centre, may even be influential in winning or losing Government. The fierce political competition that this has engendered has, amongst other things, encouraged political parties to court a number of populist lines in different States. This is particularly true of the BJP, as it has sought to replace the waning support generated by the Ayodhya temple-mosque controversy (Hansen, 1999) with other issues, often pitched at the regional or State scale. Regional movements may offer particularly attractive mobilisations to support, given the clear potential political pay-offs (in terms of MPs and State Governments) that would result from the creation of a new federal unit. For example, in the 1998 general elections the BJP won 11 of the 14 Lok Sabha (national parliament) seats in the Jharkhand region; in Uttaranchal they won 4 out of 4 seats; and in Chhattisgarh they won 7 out of 11 seats. Amongst other calculations of regional interest[12], creating these areas as States would strengthen the BJP's hand against opposition parties in Parliament, as well as bolster its position in relation to its demanding and dangerously powerful political allies. It would, in theory, deliver them more State governments, and possibly more MPs, as there are plans to increase representation in some the areas. However, continued support for the BJP in these regions was, of course, by no means assured, and it was the potential for other parties to 'poach' the

issue that appeared to drive their support for the new States and compete with the BJP over this issue. By the same token, the uncertainty as to who would reap the political reward for the new States is one reason why the BJP Government spent some time prevaricating on translating their promise into action.


DISCUSSION

The demand for new States has once again emerged as a major issue in India. In certain areas, often, although not always, characterised by economic and/or social marginalisation, and possessing a sense of geographical, ethnic, cultural and/or linguistic regional identity,[13] the struggle for a political voice and access to the state has been channelled into the desire for a separate State within the Union of India. These trends can be set within the politicisation of society observed by Atul Kohli and many others, and the related growth of social movements over the last twenty years or so. These 'changes from below' are, of course, reflexively bound up with 'changes from above' and the broader trends within India's political economy in relation to internal border changes have been the focus of this paper. This macro-political context is a key 'field of opportunity' within which these non-secessionist regional movements articulate and must be understood. The analysis presented here helps explain why a number of these demands (some of which go back decades) finally appear to be experiencing success. In a polity in which the Central Government has absolute Constitutional power over changes to federal boundaries (even if, theoretically, the State Legislatures do not approve the changes), the shift in political attitudes in New Delhi is critical.

The differences between Nehru and Indira Gandhi's regimes in relation to regional demands have been persuasively analysed by Paul Brass (1994). He argues that whereas Nehru generally sought to distance the Central Government from the regional struggles in various States, and arbitrate only in the last instance, Indira Gandhi chose to meddle dangerously and sometimes subversively in regional and other issues. This, Brass suggests, resulted in escalating levels of bitterness and violence, and paradoxically, given Indira Gandhi's centralising desires, was associated with the increasing ineffectiveness of the Central Government in managing conflicts. As more regional parties began to erode Congress dominance in the States (and then at the Centre), Indira Gandhi's Government increasingly lost the ability, as well as the desire, to act as neutrally and 'above' State politics. Although we must be careful not to draw too stark a divide between the rules of father and daughter, a decisive feature of the last thirty years of Indian politics has been the entry of the Central Government into the hurly burly of State politics, and often in a poor position to negotiate or manage the situation.

This paper has picked up the story from the late-1980s onwards, and suggests that continuing changes in India's political economy have resulted in a new relationship between the Centre and those regions demanding greater political autonomy. This paper has argued that liberalisation, the rise of the Hindu Right, the declining ability of any one party to win power at the Centre, and the concomitant rise of coalition politics, have all contributed to a qualitatively different political terrain in India in the 1990s and new millennium. In contrast to the relative stability of previous decades, the 1990s have witnessed a rapid 'turnover' of Central Governments, with four general elections between 1996 and 1999 alone (in the forty-four years prior to 1991, there had only been ten general elections). In these circumstances, different political parties have become significantly more receptive to the idea of (limited) territorial given the votes that this might win them. Political opportunism is hardly new in India, in relation to the creation of new States as much as anything else, and as Brass's

13

analysis above suggests, it would be foolish to suggest that short-term strategic decision making on this subject is an entirely novel situation. What is perhaps different is the degree and depth to which various *national* actors have been drawn in, such as the central bodies of the Congress Party, the Janata Party and the BJP (not just their State units), when in opposition and when in Government, as well as various smaller but still influential parties. In the last few years, successive Central Governments have adopted a different attitude to a number of regional demands, which, although couched in the positive (and welcome) rhetoric of greater decentralisation, may simply represent the narrow electioneering that has often characterised local and regional party political responses to this issue. The Centre is by no means toothless, and will no doubt continue to resist those non-secessionist regional movements that it deems inappropriate or divisive. However, at present, territorial reorganisation is very much back on the political agenda for India, revitalising debates on regionalism and federalism.

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[1] My concern here is with 'national' parties (such as Congress, the BJP and the Janata Party, which have an enduring national presence), as well as influential smaller parties (present in one-three States, but which have played a significant role in recent federal politics through a sufficient presence in the national parliament. Examples would include the AAIADMK, the SP and the Akali Dal).

[2] See, for example, Mawdsley (1996) on this inconsistency in relation to Uttaranchal.

[3] This represents a future research agenda. During the regional struggle in Uttaranchal, for example, many men and women spoke not just of a new State but a different State (Mawdsley, 1999). While it is more than likely that old patterns of governance will continue, the projections of what a 'good' State would be is highly suggestive. There is much to explore here in relation to grassroots and elite debates about developmental and democratic functioning and ideologies, especially at this time of change, and intensity of expectation/disappointment.

[4] A North Eastern Zonal Council followed in 1972.

[5]This remained true, inevitably, even on linguistic grounds. It has been estimated that India has over 3000 languages and dialects, of which at least 33 languages have over a million speakers.

[6]Union Territories are smaller areas and cities which, usually for historical reasons, are directly adminstered by the Centre in a number of key respects. Examples include the city of Chandigarh (on the border of Punjab and Haryana), Pondicherry and the Lakshadweep Islands.

[7]For more details on Uttaranchal (also known as Uttarakhand), see Aryal (1994), Dhoundiyal *et al* (1993), Valdiya (1996), Mehta (1996), Mawdsley (1997) and Kumar (2000).

[8]Jharkhand is made up of what had been southern Bihar. For more details, see Corbridge (1987, 1988, 1991) and Munda (1990).

[9]Chhattisgarh forms a large part of 'tribal' eastern Madhya Pradesh. Relatively little has been written about the regional movement or issue of Statehood here, but see Shukla (1999).

[10]Kohli (1990) points out that Indira Gandhi cannot be held responsible for the low party organisation of other political parties or, in some cases, their move towards populism as an electoral strategy. 'NTR' (N.T. Rama Rao) and M.G.R. Ramachandran, for example, encouraged personality cults and other populist political strategies in the Telugu Desam Party (Andhra Pradesh) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazgham (Tamil Nadu) respectively. Jalal (1995) argues that in any case Nehru's rule was more centralising than is commonly portrayed. For example, he was not averse to dismissing troublesome State governments (Congress included), such as the Communist Government of Kerala in 1959.

[11]For a more sympathetic account of planning and India's economic performance, see Chakrabarty (1987).

[12]For example, dividing Bihar was an attractive prospect to the BJP, as it would seriously undermine the power and political empire of Laloo Prasad Yadav, the tenacious *de jure* or *de facto* Chief Minister of the State.

[13]This paper does not address the thorny question of how regions may be defined in the Indian (or any other) context, but see contributors to Crane (1966) and Fox (1977), as well as Maheshwari, (1977) and Schwartzberg (1992).