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**GLOBALIZATION AND “THE POLITICS OF THE GOVERNED”:
REDEFINING GOVERNANCE IN LIBERALIZED INDIA**

Sarbeswar Sahoo

Department of Sociology
National University of Singapore
11 Arts Link
Singapore 117570

E-mail: g0403646@nus.edu.sg

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Globalization and “the Politics of the Governed”: Redefining Governance in Liberalized India

Sarbeswar Sahoo

Introduction

This paper¹ is developed from the starting point of two basic questions in globalization literature: first – is globalization a threat or an opportunity?; and second – how far does market deepening actually encourage genuine substantive democracy in the world?² A general overview of the literature suggests that globalization is a threat for the poor and an opportunity for the elites (Corbridge and Harriss 2001; Bhambhri 2005; Hanumanth Rao 2005; Jayal and Pai 2001; Kinnvall 2002; Kothari 1997; Sheth 2004; Jha 2004). The elites have been the beneficiaries of globalization since they have both the economic and social capital to compete in the market place, whereas the lives of ordinary people have been affected by rising poverty and growing inequality. They have increasingly been marginalized and excluded from the centres of power. The “threats to democracy” hypothesis³ argues that this rising poverty and inequality and the continuous marginalization of the poor is not conducive for the growth of democracy, which is a system of governance based on the idea of equality and liberty. It also inhibits collective action and the fulfilment of common purposes. Furthermore the economic marginalization of the poor manifests itself in

¹ This is an extended version of the paper presented at the 7th APRU-DSN Conference on “Inventing the Future: Trends, Perspectives and Enterprise from the Pacific Rim” at National University of Singapore during July 17–21, 2006. I would like to thank A/P VEDI R Hadiz, Dr. Assa Doron and A/P Roxana Waterson for their comments and suggestions which helped in shaping the arguments.

² The liberal theorists argue that the economic liberalization that is associated with globalization paves the way for political liberalization and finally democratization. While the critical theorists argue that global forces are mainly negative for democratization, particularly its broader societal aspects. For them, the neo-liberal economic policies promoted by the dominant institutions in the world economy create social and economic misery, increase inequality and undermine democratically elected governments (Uhlir 2002: 151). However, in this paper, I show that how this process of marginalization is utilized for further democratization in India.

³ The “threats to democracy” hypothesis has two aspects. ‘First, If India’s brand economic reform leads to greater social and economic disparities among individuals or social groups – or is seen to have done so, as it already is in many quarters – this may imperil the basis upon which Indian democracy has, in part, rested. Second, disparities between India’s regions may also grow far worse as a result of the scaling-back of central planning and the failure of many state governments to adapt to the new realities. The potential scenario worth highlighting here is not secessionism and the rupturing of India’s national unity. Rather, it is the fading of the long-cherished promise that formal “procedural” democracy could give way to a more meaningful, “substantive” form of democracy for ordinary people’ (Jenkins 1999: 221). Mehta (2003: 100-4) also argues that ‘equal we stand, unequal we fall’. For him, ‘communities, states and social organizations with less social stratification are more effective as collective agents, and many of our failings at collective action come from a sense of social distance’.

political marginalization because, as Karl Marx rightly pointed out, political power is derived from one's economic power and status in society.

However, taking into account the socio-economic and political history of the Indian nation-state during the past few years, I disagree with the "threats to democracy" hypothesis and argue that the globalization of the Indian economy has destabilized previously rigid societal structures, produced what Mehta (2003: 16) has called 'ever-greater politicization of social relationship' and has proven beneficial for the spread of democracy into the grassroots. 'Global processes of democratization have exposed the asymmetries in power and knowledge and thus provide a basis for new cultures of resistance among previously marginalized groups such as women, low-caste groups, religious and other minorities' (Kinnvall 2002: 12). Over the past few years, not only has democracy been strengthened but also, though in a different way, globalization has proven beneficial for the marginalized. It is a well-known fact that the elites have been *economically* benefiting from the globalization⁴ of capital and opening of markets; and the interests of the poor have been threatened by the growing competition, exploitation of labour and rising inequality. As a recent news report mentions, 12 Indian companies⁵ have figured in the latest list of the "Fabulous 50" compiled by prestigious international magazine Forbes Asia. According to a study conducted by the global consultancy and research company Ernst and Young, India has emerged as the second biggest foreign investor (first is the US) in the United Kingdom, with a nearly three-fold jump in the number of projects announced by Indian companies there in the first half of 2006.⁶ The Sensex has crossed the 15,000 mark which reflects the underlying strength of India's economy. This growth story is attracting global investors on an unprecedented scale. For example, foreign funds have invested \$6.3 billion this year in the Indian market, which has risen 38.6 per cent in 2006, as compared to last calendar year's 42 per cent gain.⁷ Also, Indian economic growth is running between 6 to 9 percent a year and hoping to touch 10 percent.

⁴ The leading strata of the Big Bourgeoisie is actively supporting the New Economic Policy because if transnational corporations are entering the Indian market, Indian Big Business is also going abroad to launch its own business either through investments or acquisitions. For example, Tata Steel is working on mergers and acquisitions in China, South East Asia, and the Far East for the merging markets of Rs. 250 billion where demand for steel is potentially possible. It is estimated that Indian corporate businessmen have invested US \$ 1048.78 million (Rs. 4,813 crore) abroad during 2002-03 as reported by the Reserve Bank of India on September 30, 2003 (Bhambhri 2005: 12).

⁵ These Indian firms are Bajaj Auto, Bhel, Infosys, ITC, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, L&T, Satyam Computers, Sterlite Industries, Tata Motors and Wipro. This is the second annual Fab 50 list, the best of Asia Pacific's publicly-traded companies with revenues or market capitalization of at least \$ 5 billion. See *The Sunday Statesman*, '12 Indian firms in Fab 50 list', New Delhi, September 24, 2006, p. 12.

⁶ While the US firms announced 145 investment projects in the UK in the first half of FY 06 up from 102 a year ago, projects announced by Indian companies nearly trebled to 21 from 8 in the past year. See *Hindustan Times*, 'India second biggest foreign investor in UK', New Delhi, October 06, 2006, p. 17.

⁷ *The Indian Express*, 'Sensex crosses 13,000 barrier', New Delhi, October 31, 2006, p. 11

I will not go into the success story of the elites; my interest lies on the marginalization of the poor, since I believe that class inequality is the driving force for democratization and subordinate classes have usually been the ones to push for it. I argue that though the marginalized are the losers in the economic field, they have found expression in the political field, and as a result a new “politics of the governed”⁸ has emerged. The interests of the rich that were previously supported by the state have now been constrained by the rising subaltern politics⁹ in recent years. The poor have resorted to the political space provided to them by the constitutional democracy. By using this space through their increasing participation in the political sphere and demanding their due rights, they have challenged the hegemony of the elites. The question one then might ask is why they did not use this political space previously, given that it had been ensured by the Constitution long before in the 1950s? I argue that the “contradictions of globalization” i.e. rising inequality, increasing exploitation, growing unemployment and, most importantly, the state’s withdrawal from social welfare services,¹⁰ transformed them from what Karl Marx once called, a “class-in-itself” to a “class-for-itself”. Their suffering gives rise to a unique consciousness about the structural dynamics of capitalist society and organizes them, in Gramscian terminology, as a “counter-hegemonic” force in civil society. This new counter-hegemonic force is an outcome of what Karl Polanyi (1975) has called, “the double movement” in which political movements respond to the developments in the economy and market. The first movement – expansion of the market and consequently the rolling back of the state give way to the second movement of regulating the ill effects of the former. The latter found expression through the increasing participation of the subalterns in electoral politics, various grassroots mobilizations and assertion of citizenship rights, which, in turn, has unsettled the existing power equations and changed the nature of democratic politics in India.

Defining Globalization

⁸ “Politics of the governed” is borrowed from Partha Chatterjee (2004) where he argues that development of democracy in the developing world, especially in India, does not primarily depend on the modernist politics of citizenship and civil society but on the domain of “political society” where the marginal population demand and negotiate their entitlements – often in illegal ways – with the postcolonial state through the discourse of “governmentality”.

⁹ By subaltern I mean the poor and marginalized who have hitherto been discriminated against economically, socially and culturally. Class interests are not the only interests that can be the basis for collective action and political mobilization. Religious, caste and ethnic identities also constitute some other major base for mobilization. These diverse and heterogeneous groups with homogeneous (common) identity as the “exploited” are generally referred as the “subalterns”. According to Prakash (1994: 1477), ‘the term “subaltern”, drawn from Antonio Gramsci’s writings, refers to subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/dominated relationship in history’. Though they possess citizenship rights, they lack the agency to exercise these rights and ask for entitlements. They are the subject of “Governmentality”, welfare and development (Chatterjee 1998; Huber and Stephens 2001: 19). For me, this group is the driving force for democratic transformation.

¹⁰ The twentieth century welfare state in the capitalist countries was projected as a moral and ‘human face of capitalism’. But since the 1990s the welfare state is retreating because of the thinking that ‘bureaucracy cannot do business’ (Bhambhri 2005: 185-87).

Globalization has become a buzzword in the social science literature since the 1990s and has meant different things to different people. However, globalization, in this context, draws heavily upon “the economic logic of marketization”, and is characterized by an open market, free flow of capital, international trade, foreign investment, labour mobility, culture of consumerism and the “rule of multinational capital” over the nation-states. It is referred to as the “highest form of capitalism” based on the idea of accumulation and expansion of profit across nation-states. It is a process which gives a green light to capital and a red light to the movement of labour. Labour mobility is not allowed to reach the doors of capital in the developed world because of the unequal wage structure (Sinha 2004: 122); instead capital comes in search of cheap labour in the developing countries because it makes the production cost very low (this is the reason why developed countries today outsource everything to the developing countries). It has brought the nation states economically closer than ever before in the history of humankind. This process of globalization is guided by the principle of neo-liberalism, which offers the consumers a freedom to choose but at the cost of liberal values like equality and liberty.

Social Welfare and Democratic Citizenship

Social welfare policies are important for the enhancement of democratic citizenship.¹¹ The defense of the welfare state is not to be confined to ‘the demands of the electors’ but is intended ‘to pursue social justice and satisfy people’s needs’ (Duncan 1989: 297). A welfare state guarantees the provisions for elementary education, minimum standards of health care, economic security (food security, protection against unemployment, old age, illness and disability) and a civilized life. It attempts to redress the existing social and economic inequalities in society and maintain a balance of power through ensuring social reproduction for the marginalized sections of society. It restricts the role of the market since the latter increases the divide between the rich and the poor. It also protects the interests of labour from the exploitative market forces and creates large areas of productive activity for the poor, such as employment opportunities and food for work programmes. The ‘democratic welfare policies strengthen democratic citizenship by giving material and organizational support to subordinate groups and by reducing differences in social status and social power’ (Rueschemeyer 2001: 80).

Welfare policies, thus, by ensuring social reproduction for the poor and the marginalized, encourage their participation in the political process, which, in turn, leads towards a balance of class power and the establishment of political equality in society. As Rueschemeyer (2001: 82) argues, social

¹¹ For an opposite view, see Hoffman (2004) where he argues that the functions once performed by the people themselves are taken over by the state, so that the welfare state becomes an anthill of bureaucracies, each acting in its own selfish interest. Quoting Wolin’s words, he argues that those dependent on welfare become “virtueless citizens” whose presence is both a creation of, and a justification for, state power.

welfare policies encourage and nurture democratic citizenship ‘by reducing inequalities (1) in wealth and income¹², (2) in status and prestige, and (3) in power and influence’. This reduction of inequality leads to the strengthening of a democratic system because democracy is a political system based on the principle of balance of (class) power. Welfare states provide social and economic security for the disadvantaged citizens, who can not pay their own way (Hoffman 2004: 91). But, with the emergence of neo-liberal individualism, the priority has been shifted on the part of the state, which means the reduced role of the government has redefined the political to someone’s advantage (Duncan 1989: 298). ‘It favours the haves over the have-nots, men over women, the conventional over the dissenting, the dominant over the subordinate. It divides individuals and as a result individualism becomes a creed for favouring some individuals over the others. The real position of each individual is masked by market-based abstraction’ (Hoffman 2004: 91).

Taking into account the role of the various governments across the world Esping-Andersen (1990) developed taxonomies of the welfare state by looking into the European, American and Southeast Asian types. The European model of welfare state is grounded on the principles of social democracy aimed at redressing the inequalities of early industrialization through a broad range of publicly provided goods and services. The American model is grounded on the principles of neo-liberalism and is characterized by a preference for the private provision of social goods accompanied by low taxation and high levels of voluntary philanthropy. The Southeast Asian model is based on a politically strong state guiding the enterprises towards industrialization and placing high importance on educational development and “Confucian” values. In this context, South Asia emerged as a unique kind of welfare state. The South Asian countries, especially the postcolonial Indian state, was influenced by Soviet Socialism and British Fabianism and grounded on the constitutional notions of rights, entitlements and social justice, where the state is strongly committed to providing an extensive array of public goods and free basic social services. The Fundamental Rights in the Constitution guaranteed equality and liberty to citizens and the Directive Principles of State Policy made the provision of free and compulsory education for children, promotion of the educational and economic interests of the Schedule Castes (SCs), Schedule Tribes (STs) and other weaker sections and many other welfare functions (Narayan 2001: 48-92; Kumar 2005: 336-63). This commitment of the welfare state towards social policy played a significant role in postcolonial human development and democratic socialism in India.¹³

¹² Pateman (cited in Hoffman 2004: 93) argues that guaranteed basic income would give people a real choice as to how and in what way they wanted to work, and empower citizens as a whole. It would enable people to think much more about the “quality of life” and the ecological consequences of material production. It would enhance the sense of community and individual autonomy, and underpin the social and communal character of wealth creation.

¹³ This paragraph heavily draws from Gabriele Kohler’s (2006: 37-41) discussion of Esping-Andersen’s taxonomies on three worlds of welfare capitalism. He defines South Asia as a hybrid welfare state.

The Loss of Paradise and the Politics of the Governed

How has globalization given rise to a new politics of the governed? Addressing this issue, I discuss how the decline of the welfare-oriented state¹⁴ has increased the plight of the marginalized in India, which in turn has given rise to a new politics of the subaltern as an alternative to the elitist model provided by the previously “statist model of development” and now by globalization.

India is a country where most needs and entitlements are formally recognized by the Constitution and a set of Legislative Acts. The advent of globalization¹⁵ and spread of privatization witnessed the ‘demise of the hegemony of the language of socialism in Indian politics’ (Yadav 1999: 23); and with this, the Indian state started withdrawing itself from the major sectors of social services and welfare functions which has ‘rendered redistributive politics irrelevant’ (Mehta 2003: 165). As Bhambhri (2005: 190) rightly notes, ‘if the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s capitalism was “welfare”, the 1990s capitalist states are rejecting welfarism to their citizens; the capitalist countries are in crisis because of the breakdown of the “Social Contract” between the capitalists and the working classes’. Due to the neo-liberal restructuring, structural adjustment programmes and integration of global economies, nation-states lost autonomy over their welfare policies (Brady, Beckfield and Seeleib-Kaiser 2005: 923). Thus ‘globalization strengthens markets against the state’ (Huber and Stephens: 2001: 34). It reduced the political and economic role of the state and affected its image as the protector of citizen’s welfare, which ultimately produced social and economic dislocation as well as personal uncertainty and insecurity (Kinnvall 2002: 12-13). For example, public expenditure for social development has decreased consistently in the last decade. In 2001, there was a shortfall of INR 6 billion (US\$ 127.6 million) for social services, INR 10 billion (US\$ 212.7 million) for rural development and INR 6.8 billion (US\$ 144.6 million) for agriculture (Samuel 2002: 113). The decade of the 1990s has witnessed neglect of rural India and weakening of agricultural

¹⁴ I am not arguing that the welfare state in India which was grounded on the principles of rights, entitlements and social justice has completely eroded with the advent of globalization. However, my interest here is the ‘gradual decline’ (not the demise) of the welfare state in India and its implications for the democratic polity. Despite of the declining public expenditure on health and social services, there still exist many important welfare measures for its people. As Kohler (2006) rightly points out, South Asian countries are strong supporters of the Millennium Declaration of the U.N General Assembly in 2000.

¹⁵ Because of the disillusionment with the mixed economy, especially persistent poverty, and low rates of growth left India with few policy options except to allow the administration of the IMF-authored structural adjustment program (Jayal and Pai 2001: 12). Although poverty has been a part of Indian society since independence, the interests of the poor were never threatened. The “Congress system” was sensitive to the interests of the poor and the marginalized (Kothari 1964). But, with the advent of the globalization the interest of the poor have been threatened which is manifested in the displacement of tribals from their livelihood, growing number of suicides among the farmers, increasing inequality and the inaccessibility of the poor to public health, education and other social services.

investment. While the rich countries¹⁶ are spending more in farm subsidies, India is gradually reducing its public sector investment in agriculture and giving way to the private sector enterprises (see Table 1). As the recent *Human Development Report 2006* shows, inequality in the agricultural sector has also increased in India, only about 13 per cent of the population has access to irrigation, and within this group the richest one-third of farmers receives 73 per cent of the subsidy. However, ‘the tail-end farmers suffer twin-disadvantage: less water and more uncertainty and the poverty among the tail-end farmers in India is typically about 11 percentage points higher’.¹⁷

Table.1: Gross Capital Formation in Agriculture and Allied Sector (at 1993-94 prices)

	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total (Rs. Crore)
1981-82	7130	6499	14079
1991-92	4346	10589	14965
2000-01	4520	14931	19451
Pre-reform (Average)	6212	8289	14502
Post-reform (Average)	4777	12589	17366

Source: Bhambhri (2005: 16)

The state governments have been reducing budgetary allocations for elementary education, as a result of which 63 million children age 6 to 14 are out of school today. The Kothari Commission Report (1964-66) prescribed 6 per cent of GDP for education, but public expenditure on education has been around 3 per cent. Latest estimates show that INR 470 billion (US\$ 10 billion) would be required to provide universal elementary education by the year 2015. The World Bank-funded District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), extended to 240 districts in 16 states, has failed to make the desired impact. In the 1980s, national-level enrollment grew by 2.5 per cent per annum. This growth declined to about 0.41 per cent between 1995 and 1998. The 93rd amendment to the Indian Constitution ensures the fundamental right to education. However, lack of required budgetary allocations and the ongoing attempts to privatize education are denying this right to the poor (Samuel 2002: 112-3).

In the employment sector both the private and public sector companies have been reducing the workforce, for which India’s job market has shrunk significantly in the post-reform period¹⁸. Since quantitative restrictions were lifted on 1 April 2001, the market has been flooded with cheap Chinese products which affect the small-scale industries adversely. This provision of the WTO-led policy regime

¹⁶ Rich countries spend some US \$ 300 billion a year on farm subsidies, about six times more than on development aid. The European Union cow is the most pampered. The United States funnels more than \$ 3 billion a year in subsidies to its cotton farmers, three times its aid to Africa (Bhambhri 2005: 16-17).

¹⁷ *The Indian Express*, ‘Drenched in Subsidies’, New Delhi, November 10, p.8.

¹⁸ The number of employed in the organized sector has fallen unchecked from 282.45 lakh in 1997 to 227.89 lakh in 2001. The fall was sharper in the public sector where the number of employed has fallen by 4.20 lakh or 2.2 per cent during the period. The number of employed in the organized private sector during the same period has fallen by 0.4 per cent from 86.86 lakh in 1997 to 86.52 lakh in 2001 (Bhambhri 2005: 67; *Economic Times* May 12, 2003: 10).

has placed the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people in the agricultural and small-scale sectors under unprecedented threat (Samuel 2002: 113). According to an estimate, more than 25,000 peasants in India have taken their lives since 1997 when the practice of seed saving was transformed under globalization pressures and multinational seed corporations started to take control of the seed supply (Shiva 2004). The National Sample Survey Organization confirms that ‘the growth rate of employment has declined from 2.7 percent per annum during 1983-94 to 1.07 per cent during 1993-2000 when the growth of output, that is gross domestic product, accelerated from 5.2 per cent to 6.7 per cent’ (Bhambri 2005: 67). According to Jha (2004: 134-48), employment in the organized sector has stopped growing. While the number of job seekers is rising by 2.5 per cent per year, the growth of employment in this sector fell to 0.46 per cent in 1998, to 0.04 per cent in 1999, to – 0.15 per cent in 2000 and – 0.38 per cent in 2001. In all, 672,000 educated entrants into the job market have tried to find jobs every year, but only 17,000 have succeeded. In the four years of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) rule, therefore, India has added 2.7 million young people to the educated unemployed. The latest ILO report also shows the plight of the unemployed in India. ‘While the number of young unemployed increased from 74 million to 85 million, or 14.8 per cent between 1995 and 2005, more than 300 million youth, or approximately 25 per cent of the youth population were living below the \$2 per day poverty line.’¹⁹

Health expenditure in India is dominated by private spending, essentially because of inadequate public spending, and this situation has further deteriorated in the past 15 years. As the data show, ‘the public health investment in India is among the lowest in the world’²⁰ and the budgetary allocation for the Public Health System had decreased from 1.3 per cent in 1990 to as low as 0.8 per cent in 2001-02 (see Table 2).²¹ However, it is observed that people have come to place greater value on health care, so that even the poor are willing to spend more to ensure minimal health care. According to the National Health Accounts of India for 2001, households accounted for more than two-thirds of health spending in the country, around three times the amount of all government (central, state and local) expenditure taken

¹⁹ The ILO report estimates that at least 400 million decent and productive employment opportunities will be needed in order to reach the full productive potential of today’s youth. According to the report, of the 1.1 billion young people aged 15 to 24 worldwide, one out of three is either seeking but unable to find work, has given up the job search entirely or is working but living on less than \$2 a day. Also while the youth population grew by 13.2 per cent between 1995 and 2005, employment among young people grew by only 3.8 per cent to reach 548 million. See *The Hindu*, New Delhi, October 30, 2006, p. 9.

²⁰ India has the lowest ratio of public to private health expenditure among almost all countries in the world, both developed and developing. Compared with India’s public and private health spending ratio of 1:4, the ratio in China is around 2:3, while even Pakistan has a ratio of 1:3. In most developed countries, of course, public health spending is much greater than private spending. The current annual *per capita* public health expenditure is INR 160, less than US\$ 4. The draft of the Government of India admits, ‘economic liberalization has resulted in the declining *per cent* of state resources allocated to the health sector’ (Ghosh 2006: 129-30; Samuel 2002: 112).

²¹ According to Ghosh (2006), in recent years a great proportion of GDP has been taken up by revenue expenditure (essentially, the payment of salaries) rather than on capital expenditure for creating much needed basic physical infrastructure for health facilities.

together. The preliminary results from the latest National Sample Survey Data for 2004-05 suggest that for rural households spending on health now accounts for as much as 6.6 per cent of their total consumption expenditure, up from 5.4 per cent in 2003-04. For urban households, the increase has been from 4.6 per cent to 5.2 per cent (Ghosh 2006: 130). ‘The infant mortality rate for the Schedule Tribes and Schedule Castes are 82.2 and 83 per 1000 respectively, much higher than the national average of 70 per 1000. Among the Schedule Tribes and Schedule Castes, the percentage of underweight children is 55.9 and 53.5 respectively. Outbreaks of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS are very high among the poor. The withdrawal of the government from the health sector affects the primary health of the poor, particularly the reproductive health of the women’ (Samuel 2002: 112-13). Though India has improved its position in the overall ranking (from 127 to 126 in 177 countries) in the latest *Human Development Report 2006*, it still loses the highest number of lives to diarrhea in the world. Of the 1.8 million diarrhea deaths in the world, India has 450,000. Nearly two-thirds of the Indian population has no access to sanitation. It also mentions that despite high economic growth, India’s child mortality continues to remain high. As the report points out, India’s military spending is eight times more than on water and sanitation.²²

Table.2: Expenditure of Central and State Governments on Health

Years	Percentage of GDP at current market price
1993-94	1.25
1994-95	1.22
1995-96	1.02
1996-97	0.95
1997-98	1.00
1998-99	1.11
1999-2000	0.90
2001-2002	0.80

Source: Samuel (2002: 113); Ghosh (2006: 129-30)

Equity disinvestment in public sector companies was also accelerated with the institution of a special ministry (Teltumbde 2006: 256). These were gradually taken over by the large multinationals and private organizations, which has gradually been pushing the poor to the brink of destitution. However, this formal package of reform proved favorable to the interests of the elites, creating what Corbridge and Harriss (2001) have called “elite revolution”. The state is no longer *the* organization as it was before (as the principal organizing unit of political and economic life); it is represented as one of many agencies, organizations or associations. It ceded its responsibilities and entered into partnership with various

²² Today some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water and 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation. One in every six people in the world is denied the right to clean, accessible and affordable water. This violation translates into nearly two million avoidable child deaths each year. Only one in three Indians has access to any form of improved sanitation. See *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, November 10, p. 1-2.

multinationals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to carry out the functions it was performing before.

With this privatization and pluralization of the state apparatus, the people in civil society were left to be responsible for their own social reproduction (Chandhoke 2003a; Alam 2005: 127). As Mishra rightly points out, ‘globalization triggers a race to the bottom, in which workers are recommodified, citizens have less social security, and capital dominates the state’ (cited in Brady, Beckfield and Seeleib-Kaiser 2005: 923). This means the entry of market forces into local spaces without much mediation by way of protection; the rolling back of the state from many areas of welfare; and the decline of political process, which necessarily involved the decline of interest in the poor and gradually led to their destitution (Kothari 1997: 229). Liberal democracy protected the interests of the market rather than those of the marginalized (Sahoo 2005). These developments carried serious implications for the disadvantaged groups, who found themselves no longer in a position to ensure their social reproduction. Where formerly they had been enabled to do so by the welfare state, they were now thrown upon the not-so-tender mercies of the market and a rather uncivil society (Chandhoke 2003a; Sahoo 2006). The rich became richer by the logic of accumulation and market forces, and the poor became poorer by the logic of exploitation and exclusion.²³

As the data also shows, the rate of economic growth, which was around 3.5 per cent²⁴ before the reforms in 1991, had exceeded 7.5 per cent by the mid-1990s. Being the outsourcing heaven of the developed world and by pulling in resources from around the world, India today has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with a GDP growth rate of 8-9 per cent. ‘This high rate of growth, distributed inequitably, has led to an increase in the number of poor people²⁵, and also to the widening of the regional disparity’ (Kohler 2006: 37). The industrially advanced states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Kerala and Tamilnadu have prospered, but at the same time the poverty trends in the five traditionally poorer states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh and also in Assam and West Bengal, worsened after 1990. Kurian (2000) classified the former as the “forward group” and the later as the “backward group” (see also Ganguly 2002: 46-7; Ray 2002: 46). The question, however, is how we could explain this rising regional disparity

²³ For example, Patnaik (cited in Sainath 2004) points out that ‘the average family is absorbing annually nearly 100 kg less of food grain today than a mere five years ago. (That is) a phenomenal drop... never seen before in the last century of India’s history’. As she has also shown, the absolute amount of per capita food availability for the year 2002-03 was lower than during the time of the Bengal famine in which an estimated 1.5 to 3 million people died.

²⁴ This slow rate of growth was popularly described by Prof. Raj Krishna as “the Hindu Rate of Growth”.

²⁵ Between 1951 and 1955 more than half of all Indians (53 per cent) existed below the poverty line. The situation remained largely unchanged until 1971-74. But from 1973-77 to 1986-87, poverty declined steadily to 38 per cent; and between 1989-90, it declined still further to 34.07 per cent. In July 1991, when the reforms were launched, 36.34 per cent of Indians were poor, and at the end of 1997, 34.4 per cent were still poor, the same as in 1990, shortly before the reforms. Another Survey reveals that the number of people existing below poverty line has actually increased to approximately 40 per cent (Ray 2002: 46).

in India in the post-reform period? Hnauanth Rao (2005: 14) provides a brilliant explanation when he argues that ‘liberalization and privatization are going to immediately favour the developed regions, which are adequately served with infrastructure. Unless the development of backward regions where poverty is extensive gets a high priority in the package of reforms, the accentuation of regional disparities in development is almost a certainty, as is already borne out by the post reform experience of the 1990s’. This responsibility of allocating financial resources to different regional states is entrusted to the Finance Commission, whose decision was first questioned by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu where he voiced the opinion that ‘the Finance Commission should not punish the “economically developed states” by conceding to the needs of the “backward states”’. Whether India is moving towards “islands of development” versus a “mainland of poverty” is a question for speculation (Bhambhri 2005: 63). Along with this rising regional disparity, globalization, in guise of development, has also disrupted communities, cultures, and livelihoods of the poor without offering them any viable and dignified alternative (Sheth 2004).

These “contradictions of globalization” manifested themselves in the increasing rate of exploitation of the poor. The increase in (class) exploitation created a common consciousness which transformed the subaltern identity from a “class-in-itself” to a “class-for-itself” and provided greater capability for self-organization. As Shah (2002: 21) argues, ‘members of the same class not only have common interests vis-à-vis other classes, but also share a common consciousness regarding their position in society and the common interests they share facilitates their collective action against the ruling classes and the state’. This, in turn, geared up the communities as politically significant rather than being mere ritual status groups, and led to the rise of various social movements²⁶ concerning citizenship rights at the grassroots to represent the interests of ordinary people and their aspirations for carving out an autonomous space to discuss the essence of freedom, autonomy, and dignity of human existence. It was in this precise context that individuals (who were previously passive citizens and subjects of government welfare programmes) transformed into rights-bearing citizens and the marginalized were mobilized against the elitist project of globalization which gave rise to a new politics of the governed, expressed through class coalition, subaltern mobilization and new social movements²⁷. This new politics is based on what Charles Taylor (1994) has called “the politics of recognition” because it interrogates the notion of a

²⁶ This increasing mobilization of the subaltern groups did not undermine or threaten the established political order as was predicted by Huntington (1968), because the subalterns wanted to continue with the same system of governance. What the subalterns threatened was the power of the dominant class; and what they wanted was to redress inequalities, increase their autonomy in decision-making and participate equally in the process of democratic governance.

²⁷ Rosenau (1998: 42) argues that social movements ‘have evolved as well-springs of global governance in recent decades and are perhaps the quintessential case of nascent control mechanisms that have the potential of developing into institutionalized instruments of democratic governance’.

monolithic nation-state and puts forward a critique against the process of homogenization in society; and it is not only about dignity but also about entitlements, substantive rights and freedom (Mohapatra 2002: 170).

Grassroots Mobilization and Subaltern Participation

The question then is how this politics of the governed is manifested. What is the nature of this “new” politics? And how did it try to redress the growing inequality and alienation of the marginalized? Following Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992: 57) who wrote that ‘those who have only to gain from democracy will be its most reliable promoters and defenders, those who have the most to lose will resist it and will be most tempted to roll it back when the occasion presents itself’, I argue that this “new” politics of the governed is essentially democratic in nature, because democratization provides the opportunity for redressing inequalities of class and power and establish a new balance of power.²⁸

The expression of this new politics is very unique. Unlike the elites, those involved have neither the economic nor the social capital²⁹ to compete in the market economy. What they have is a common (oppressive) group identity and a political space ensured by their constitutional rights. Considering this, I argue that the politics of the governed has manifested itself primarily in two ways – first, through associational politics and mass mobilization; and second, through the legal democratic space provided to them by the Constitution in the form of increasing participation in electoral politics.³⁰ They appear to believe that the rising economic gap, increasing poverty and growing alienation from the centres of power can be addressed only by their active representation in the political arena. The subaltern’s desire for social justice has thus translated the submissive language of mass alienation (passive welfare) into assertive mass mobilization, demanding their due rights. This has led to the rise of a “shared solidarity of the oppressed”, expressed through various organizations and political parties that represent their interests.

Caste mobilization has appealed to the “politics of self-respect” because a sense of shared identity can overcome collective problems. This has made caste an important axis of mobilization and makes its politics appear inevitable (Mehta 2003: 65). In many states of India, the previously discriminated castes,

²⁸ Some might argue that “socialism” also talks about equality. Why did then it not appeal to the subalterns? I argue that socialism advocates statelessness, but the subalterns want to bring change through the help of various institutions of state and political power. Secondly, it is more a question of “political equality” and less of “class equality”, because they think class inequality could be addressed once they achieve political power.

²⁹ They do not have connections with the people at the upper layers of economy and polity who could help them advance their interests. In this sense, they lack what Putnam (2001) calls “bridging social capital”. However, they have strong “bonding social capital” which organizes them into a single identity as “exploited”.

³⁰ This is similar to Robert Dahl’s idea of “contestation” and “participation” or “liberalization” and “inclusiveness” which constitute two basic characteristics of democracy. For him, increasing contestation in electoral politics and increasing inclusion of the marginalized in political process determine the quality of democracy in a country (see Dahl 1971; Varshney 2000: 15-16).

i.e. the Dalits and Tribals, have acquired political power. In North India the lower caste and tribal political groups are becoming successful, namely the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samata Party in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand Mukti Morchha in Jharkhand. This political awareness among the lower castes of North India occurred very late; however in South India, there has been a long history of social movements and political mobilization (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamilnadu) among the lower castes against their exclusion from the political and public sphere (see Bardhan 2005: 93; Varshney 2000). Political power can give Dalits access to state resources that ensures that the latter is not complicit in reproducing social inequity. Access to state jobs and institutions of higher education through affirmative action can be helpful to the extent that it can create a small middle class and challenge the culture of governance that has subordinated Dalits (Mehta 2003: 81-82). Thus, access to political power became the swiftest route towards social mobility and redressal of inequality and discrimination.

These movements are plural and multi-dimensional, and have mobilized themselves not only against the class character of globalization but also against other aspects like caste discrimination, tribal displacement, environmental degradation, loss of livelihood, exploitation of gender, and also often against the democratic state which tries to violate the democratic rights of the people in the name of development. Some examples are the anti-corruption and Right to Information (RTI) movement of the Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (Organization for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants) in southern Rajasthan, later extending to other parts of the country, which resulted in the passing of Right to Information Act; the Chipko environmental movement in Uttaranchal; the struggle for Right to Food and Employment which resulted in the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement); the struggle against mining and tribal displacement in many parts of India, especially in Kalingnagar in Orissa; the Jungle Jamin Jan Andolan (Peoples' Movement for Forest Land) to give property rights to the tribals; the struggle for the right to education which recognized primary education as a fundamental right; the right to health campaign; the movement for water conservation by Tarun Bharat Sangh in Rajasthan; the movement for democratic development and decolonization of the common lands by Seva Mandir in the tribal-dominated areas of southern Rajasthan, and several others. As some guesstimates suggest, there are 50,000 to 100,000 movement groups active in the country today. We are also witnessing upsurge in the political empowerment of women with close to a million women being a part of the Panchayats (village councils) and local bodies and acting as architects of social change.³¹ There has been increasing economic participation of women who have played a crucial role in raising their income level and improving their living standards by their exemplary participation in Self Help Groups (SHGs) movements. According to the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural

³¹ *The Indian Express*, 'Across the Fault Lines', New Delhi, March 1, 2007, p. 11.

Development (NABARD), more than 400 women join the SHGs movement in India every hour (see Table 3). Over a whopping 2.2 million SHGs have so far been offered minimum banking service and NABARD expects to provide credit support to almost 0.6 million new groups by 2007 with 60 per cent of them coming from 13 underdeveloped states.³²

Table.3: Growth of SHG-Bank Linkage Scheme (as on March 31, 2006)

	2004	2005	2006
All India	10,79,091	16,18,456	22,38,565
Orissa	77,588	1,23,256	1,80,896
Uttar Pradesh	79,210	1,19,648	1,61,911
West Bengal	51,535	92,698	1,36,251
Maharashtra	38,846	71,146	1,31,470
Rajasthan	33,846	60,006	98,171

Source: *Economic Times* (October 20, 2006: 14)

Apart from being active in the non-state sphere of politics through associations and mobilizations, they have also entered into the formal sphere of politics through their rising participation in electoral democracy. They have increasingly realized the fact that voting is an important tool of their political empowerment and thus using elections to articulate their political choices. Alam (2005) argues that in comparison to the 1970s, the 1990s witnessed the electoral upsurge of the disadvantaged groups which has radically transformed the nature of Indian politics. He further argues that though the voting percentage has not changed significantly between 1971 and 1996, the internal composition of the voting public has changed in a dramatic manner. In 1971, there were more upper caste, urban and college educated voters, whereas in 1996 there were more non-literate people, rural based people, Muslims, Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and Other Backward Castes. Also, ‘the poor in India tended to vote more than the middle classes and the rich’ (Alam 2005: 27). Yogendra Yadav (2000) defines this greater participation and intense politicization of the marginalized groups as the “second democratic upsurge”. The social foundations of political power today – as distinct from the class character of the state – comprise more vulnerable sections of the population than in 1971 (Alam 2005: 27; Mehta 2003: 135-36). ‘In the absence of other forums of dissent, elections became the single most political event for most of the people, especially the underprivileged. The assertion of the right to vote is a political act, and in that sense, a vote for democracy’³³. Thus, their increasing participation in electoral politics reveals their increasing involvement in choosing the authority with a “conditional grant” (Mehta 2003: 11) for a fixed period and the increasing affirmation of political equality in society.

³² According to NABARD Chairman Mr. Y.S.P Thorat, the SHG model accounts for almost 60 per cent of today’s micro-finance business with the MFIs doing the rest. Interestingly, eight large MFIs corner 60 per cent of their total share at present. See *Economic Times*, ‘SHGs rope in 400 women per hour’, New Delhi, October 20, p. 14.

³³ *The Times of India*, ‘Democracy Remains Healthy’, New Delhi, October 23, 2006, p. 12

This shows that though the privileged sections of society are doing well economically, they are gradually becoming alienated from the democratic process. The question then is what implications this may have for democratic politics in India? As Huber and Stephens (1999: 761) argue that ‘though the bourgeoisie made important contributions to the move towards democracy by insisting on its share in political power in the form of parliamentary control of the state, they were hostile to further democratization when its interests seemed threatened’. Also Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992: 60) point out that ‘any class that is dominant both economically and politically will not be eager to dilute its political power by democratization’. It is true that Indian democracy is a “gift” of the elites to the masses in that the elites willingly incorporated the Indian masses into the decision-making process; but they retained democracy as an “elitist” form of governance in which a group of competing elites collectively share privilege and power (Kohli 1988: 9; see also Mehta 2003: 5). In relation to the subalterns’ move towards further democratization, it is likely that it would be resisted by the economically and politically powerful that is to say the bourgeoisie and the upper class. However, as we have seen, though the elites are gradually becoming alienated from formal political processes, there has been no such resistance from them against the subalterns’ movement for further democratization. Why?

There could be two explanations for this: either interests of the bourgeoisie have not yet been threatened; or they have been willing for further democratization and sharing of power with the subalterns. An in-depth analysis of Indian political structure and power relation reveals that neither of the two are correct. There is a third factor which argues that ‘capitalist relations of production tend to create an *internally competing, peacefully disunited ruling class*. In its development, capital is divided into several fractions: mercantile, banking, industrial, agrarian, small and big’ (Therborn 1977: 31, emphasis original). Globalization, which is considered as a form of capitalism, has produced paradoxical effects: on the one hand, it has increased the capability of the subalterns and helped formulating circumstantial alliances for self-organization by creating a common consciousness from their common condition of exploitation; and on the other hand, it has fragmented the bourgeoisie further into competing and conflicting interests groups within the capitalist economic system.

The spread of the global market has eventually expanded the size of the middle class (approximately 300 million)³⁴ who demand liberal voting procedures and liberal democratic institutions (Kinnvall 2002: 8). The middle class is constituted of the lower end of the propertied bourgeoisie class and the upper end of the ex-subaltern class who have become a significant ally of the subalterns in a pro-democratic coalition³⁵. This alliance across class boundaries has proven to be critically important for

³⁴ *The Straits Times*, Singapore, June 29, 2006: Home 11

³⁵ The middle class has joined the pro-democratic alliance because it has also been adversely affected by the effects of economic reform, such as increase in fuel prices, rising cost of living and most importantly the withdrawal of subsidies from education (Ray 2002: 48).

further democratization. However, as Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992: 59) point out, ‘the potential allies of the working class do not...emerge independently of class structure’. They further argue that ‘the role of different classes in the struggle about the form of government must be analyzed historically in terms of their conflicting interests, the transformation of economy and social order by capitalist development, and the changing opportunities for class coalitions and compromises’ (ibid: 58). The interest of this newly emerging middle class is always in conflict with those who have control over the economy and polity and it is more likely to support the democratization process. The lower section of the bourgeois middle class would like the elites out of power, and thus supports the subaltern classes in democratization, which might give them an opportunity to power through leadership. Similarly, the upper section of the subaltern middle class supports democratization because they have previously experienced exploitation by the bourgeoisie.

In another way, the middle class has also become the partner of the working class and other subaltern classes in democratization. Since the Planning Commission meeting with NGOs in 1994, whose aim was to make them active partners in development, the middle class in India has been very active in the NGO sector. This meeting reinforced the growth of the NGO sector in India as an “institutional” partner of the government to arrive at practical and innovative solutions to societal problems. This rapid growth of NGOs in India and elsewhere (even in non-democratic societies) illustrates the inherent need of citizens to seek representation of their interests beyond the ballot, as tax payers, users of public goods, and in seeking participations in social and community affairs (Sinha 2004: 121). As Srivastava and Tandon (2005: 1948) note, there are 1.2 million non-profit organizations (with 19.2 million people as volunteers) working in India today who have been supported by the international developmental agencies to work with the poor and marginalized. The Indian non-profit sector, as Srivastava and Tandon further suggest, receives 7 per cent of its total funding from foreign sources. The neo-liberal politics of the international aid³⁶ and globalization of development agenda has brought the urban educated middle class closer to the grassroots subalterns in supporting their interests.

This large scale mobilization by the coalition group raises questions about the Huntingtonian view of the social order. According to him, high levels of interest mobilization and political conflict are associated with problems of governance and civic disorder (Huntington 1968; see also Heller 2000: 500).³⁷ William Kornhauser, Robert Nisbet, Edward Shills and others are also skeptical about the

³⁶ The politics of international aid is said to be promoting democracy through grassroots organization. But it is rooted in the type of democracy that aid agencies envisage – that is, “democratic capitalism”. If a government fails to embrace liberal economics, then it is not seen to be operating within the context of liberal politics. The adoption of neo-liberal policies thus becomes a *sine qua non* for the existence of civil society because international aid promotes market-oriented economic policy through grassroots organizations. See Jenkins (1999)

³⁷ In contrast to Huntington, Weiner, in commenting on Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s role in Emergency, made an eloquent generalization that ‘Societies do not destroy their democratic institutions. States do’ (cited in Kohli 1988: 10, n. 10).

implications of mass mobilization for democracy. For them, ‘mass movements are the product of mass societies which are extremist and anti-democratic’ (Shah 2002: 21). However, with the exception of some cases, especially the forces of Hindutva and Naxalism, India’s extra-parliamentary politics and non-institutionalized collective political action have hardly threatened the institutional structure of democratic governance. In fact, it works within the legal boundaries of constitutional law for the regeneration and revival and strengthening of democratic institutions because the citizens believe that a resolution to the existing problems of inequality and exclusion can only be achieved through institutional and democratic means.³⁸ Thus, it has resulted in high levels of institutionalization, mobilization and participation, all of which prove conducive to greater democratization.

Reinstitutionalization of the Indian State

Indian politics during the period of Mrs. Gandhi had gone through a massive process of deinstitutionalization which ultimately led to the inauguration of an authoritarian emergency rule for the first time in India, which lasted for 21 months (June 25, 1975 – March 21, 1977). Party politics was undermined and a politics of populism and personal benefit made its way into Indian politics. Politics was no longer based on the will of the people but on a patron-client relationship. The civil service and bureaucracy became politicized and corrupt. According to Kohli (1990), Indian politics experienced a phase of “crisis of governability”. The “Congress system” and other political parties, which were the basis of political order in a diverse and plural society like India, were not successful in facing the challenges (Kothari 1964). In fact, in most cases, they were the reason for the decline of social order. The law and order situation was worse. Political parties, which represent the political institutionalization in a society, were themselves undermining the political order. They have become ‘electoral networks to capture state power, rather than vibrant peoples’ organizations to ensure accountable, just and democratic governance’.³⁹ They were not able, or in many cases interested, to accommodate the diverse interest groups into the power structure. This fragmented politics and corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy were the reasons for institutional failures in India. The democratic social order could not hold together the diverse interest groups and could not change the lives of the marginalized millions. The economic success of the authoritarian regimes in Asia led some people to question the legitimacy of political freedom in democratic societies. But Sinha (2004: 121) maintains that ‘the argument for democracy lies in the

³⁸ Varshney (1997: 45) rightly points out that ‘India’s various transformations are taking place within a democratic framework, the only foundation of post-independence India that has not only remained unchallenged but has undoubtedly become sturdier of late’. Weiner (1992: 85) also argues that most Indians recognize that the democratic process provides the means by which religious and ethnic conflicts can be mitigated.

³⁹ *The Times of India*, ‘Small is Beautiful’, New Delhi, October 23, 2006, p. 12

intrinsic value of political and civil liberties as the basic capabilities, as also in its instrumental value in promoting the voice people have in public affairs. Democratic institutions like free press, therefore, serve the purpose of setting the agenda of change'. As Amartya Sen (1999) rightly argues, the presence of a free press, political freedom and other democratic institutions are the reason why India avoided a great famine which China could not. Thus the political incentives provided by democratic institutions are of much more importance than economic performance. Because the economic security offered by the authoritarian state can be withdrawn at anytime, people do not really have the freedom to assert their rights. The citizens of a democratic society enjoy the civil and political rights and freedom which the citizens of autocratic states do not have (Chandhoke 2003b).

The 1990s witnessed the revival of various legal and political institutions to strengthen the democratic culture and maintain social order and stability in Indian society. This increasing institutionalization along with high organization, mobilization and participation has strengthened the democratic culture and made India governable. Some of these institutions are discussed below.

The Election Commission

The Election Commission has been very active since the time of T.N Sessan though J.M Lingdo to the present, and has kept a close watch on the behavior of the politicians and electoral process. It tries to make sure that elections are free and fair and ensure a sense of accountability and responsibility on the part of the representatives of the people. It now has the right to declare an election as fraudulent and a politician as corrupt and thereby prevent them from gaining power. It has also set up a particular limit to expenditure during the election campaign, a breach of which may lead to legal action.

The Supreme Court and PIL System

The Constitution of India has placed the socio-economic rights of the people under the Directive Principles of State Policy, which in principle are not justiciable⁴⁰. In this regard, the Indian Judiciary and the Public Interests Litigation (PIL) have proved to be important tools in increasing the marginalized/ disenfranchised sections' access to the right to development, to a dignified life and to social justice. The concept of PIL was articulated in the late 1970s (post-Emergency period) by the Supreme Court of India in an effort to reestablish its institutional credibility. The Supreme Court brought some changes in the conventional litigation and relaxed various rules of procedure to facilitate easier access to the courts.

⁴⁰ The Constitution of India extends protection of Human Rights in Part III (Fundamental Rights) and Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy). While the rights contained in Part III are enforceable in a court of law, those contained in Part IV are not. Though the Directive Principles address many issues of socio-economic empowerment and access to resources, they are intended as mere guidelines in the policy formation process and are not enforceable against the state. See Center for Development and Human Rights (2004: 231-52).

Individuals or organizations were permitted to approach the courts “in the public interest” on behalf of those unable to do so themselves. The PIL movement developed in two distinct phases. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the Supreme Court focused on the protection of human rights traditionally regarded as civil and political rights. But since the mid-1980s, it has expanded its scope and encouraged petitions on social and economic rights – the rights to food, education, health, environment, and so on.

The Indian Supreme Court’s decision to guarantee mid-day meals to all schoolchildren has been interpreted as a right to food for children and possibly unique in the world. After the 93rd constitutional amendment in 2001, education has gained the status of a fundamental right, which was earlier included in the Directive Principles of State Policy. It has also curbed the corrupt practices in the Indian political structures by obstructing the elected representatives from holding offices of profit while staying in power. These important verdicts of the Supreme Court and PIL have been protecting the rights and interests of the ordinary people, promoting social justice and facilitating democratic governance in India.

Role of Panchayati Raj (Village Councils)

Panchayat Raj is a system of self-governance where the rural people elect their local level political representatives to the village councils. It has two aspects – one is the democratic aspect and the other is the institutional aspect. The former is related to the mobilization and participation of citizens in local decision-making and the fulfilment of their political aspirations, while the latter is related to effective institutional performance for the delivery of benefits flowing from various government programmes (Social Watch 2006: 99).

Though the institution of Panchayati Raj was initiated by Nehru in October 2, 1959, the process became dormant after few years. It became the mechanism of power for the upper caste male members for the realization of their vested interest. The 73rd Amendment – 1992 of the Indian Constitution revived the institutions of local governance, diversified the power structure and transformed the political hierarchy in rural communities. It has incorporated a plurality of voices into village institutions and extended power to the ordinary people (Fehling 2000). With this, the Indian government has transferred budgetary resources and decision-making authority to the village level, which has increased the autonomy of local institutions of governance and resulted in better service delivery, and higher transparency and accountability at the grassroots. The hitherto excluded or marginalized groups like women, Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes are now enabled and empowered to decide their own development. The Panchayati Raj Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) – 1996 has also identified *Gram Sabha*⁴¹ as the nucleus of all

⁴¹ *Gram Sabha* is a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village or a group of villages which elect a Panchayat

activities, with wide-ranging powers in the Fifth-Schedule areas⁴², and this has provided self-rule to the bulk of the tribal population (Singh 1999). The constitutional status of the Panchayati Raj institutions has further been supported by the active participation of the marginalized and the holding of regular elections. It has thus established itself as a strong people's movement for decentralized governance at the grassroots (see Mathew 1994: 37-41; Fehling 2000).

Regionalization of Political Parties

Compared to the dominance of Congress in the early years, today political institutionalization is ensured by different regional parties claiming to represent different interest groups based on different identities like caste, religion, ethnicity, region, language and others. The diversification/ pluralization of political centres and the creation of regional political parties and multiple centres of power has not only given representation to the interests of the hitherto excluded groups but also strengthened the democratic political culture in Indian society. Congress, which was reluctant to accommodate the diverse interest groups and share power, has been taken over by this regionalization and diversification of political parties. Thus, the decline of Congress which was previously, as Kohli (1990) and Kothari (2001) argue, a cause of political disorder, has by now had the consequence of politicizing community and identity, enabling a wider sharing of power, and establishing political stability in Indian society.

The Media

The rigid censorship during the Emergency period provided little scope for the Indian media to maintain its freedom and criticize the government and its policies. It was state controlled and manipulated for political gains. However, with the opening of the Indian economy, both print and electronics media witnessed an unprecedented growth⁴³ and broke the hegemony of the government-controlled media. In addition, the Prasar Bharati (Indian Broadcasting) Act, which Parliament considered in 1990, also provided greater autonomy to Doordarshan and All India Radio. Transnational satellite broadcasting made its debut in January 1991, which began the proliferation of autonomous private channels that ultimately resulted in lessening the political abuse of the media and presenting alternative perspectives to the public. It has also represented the issues of the poor and demanded accountability of the government.

⁴² Essentially the Fifth-Schedule is a historic guarantee to indigenous people on the right over the land they live in. It covers tribal areas in 9 states of India namely Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Rajasthan.

⁴³ As the data suggest, in 1950 there were 214 daily newspapers, with 44 in English and the rest in Indian languages. By 1990 the number of daily newspapers had grown to 2,856, with 209 in English and 2,647 in indigenous languages. By 1993 India had 35,595 newspapers--of which 3,805 were dailies--and other periodicals. India has more than 40 domestic news agencies and more than 30 private news channels (Sardesai 2006; see also *The Media*, <http://www.country-studies.com/india/the-media.html>, accessed March 23, 2007).

The Media, thus, has established itself as one of the viable institutions of civil society that works as the watchdog of democracy.

Towards a Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that globalization of economy and the flow of transnational capital across the globe marked the rolling back of the welfare-oriented state and the demise of developmentalism. This, in turn, led to the mobilization of the masses against the oppressive structures of globalization. If we see the developments in the last twenty years, it is clear that a new political self-awareness and sense of solidarity has been growing among the marginalized sections of Indian society, who have been fighting to reclaim their rights, dignity and lost-political space. As a response, a counter-hegemonic vibrant civil society has emerged which challenges the hegemony of the elites, protects the interests of the marginalized and channels the empowerment agenda of the subaltern groups. This counter-hegemonic civil society stands as an obstacle to the capitalist state that previously gained legitimacy, acquired consensus and established hegemony through the projects of developmentalism, welfarism and passive citizenship. People now have the autonomy to devise new ways and means in which they can choose how they should be governed. I refer to this counter-hegemonic politics of civil society that articulates the rights, entitlements and interests of the marginalized as, borrowing a phrase from Partha Chatterjee (2004), “the politics of the governed”. This politics of the governed is based on the subalterns’ empowerment agenda for social justice and citizenship rights which is redefining the nature of the Indian state (institutions of democracy) and civil society. As Sheth (1995: 32) argues, social transformation for these groups is not an apolitical activity, but a live political agenda for changing the terms of discourse on democracy in India, or what Giddens (2000) calls the “democratization of democracy”.

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SARBESWAR SAHOO is a Ph.D Candidate in Department of Sociology at National University of Singapore. He is working for his dissertation on *The Dynamics of Mobilization and the Politics of Democratization: Exploring the 'Political' Role of Civil Society in Rajasthan (INDIA)*.