

Rethinking State Politics in India



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Regions within Regions

Editor

Ashutosh Kumar

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON NEW YORK NEW DELHI

First published 2011 in India
by Routledge
912–915 Tolstoy House, 15–17 Tolstoy Marg, Connaught Place,
New Delhi 110 001

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset by
Star Compugraphics Private Limited
D–156, Second Floor
Sector 7, Noida 201 301

Printed and bound in India by
Baba Barkha Nath Printers
MIE-37, Bahadurgarh, Haryana 124507

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-415-59777-7

This book is printed on ECF environment-friendly paper manufactured from unconventional and other raw materials sourced from sustainable and identified sources.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The idea of putting together this volume was first conceived while attending a three-day workshop organised in January 2003 by the Indian School of Political Economy, Pune in collaboration with the Department of Politics, University of Pune and CSDS-Lokniti, in which the state papers, using the data from National Election Studies, were presented by Lokniti Network members teaching in different Indian universities. The overall feeling among the paper presenters and experts, including D. L. Sheth, Yogendra Yadav, Suhas Palshikar, Peter deSouza and Nilkant Rath, was to move beyond state as a unit of analysis for the study of electoral politics and focus more on regions within a state and underline their specificities in a comparative mode in order to understand the larger forces and long-term changes taking place.

The project to employ intra-state or inter-state regional perspective to take up a broader study of micro-level mechanisms, which have been shaping political actions and processes of mobilisation and development at the local level, finally took concrete shape in the form of a conference, attended by many co-travellers in the Lokniti network, held in March 2007 at the Department of Political Science, Panjab University. The conference was funded from the seminar grant of the University Grants Commission's ASIHSS Programme. The ICSSR regional centre, as usual, provided excellent hospitality and institutional infrastructure to the participants. I would like to thank the UGC and Northwest Regional Centre, ICSSR. I would also like to record my profound gratitude to the contributors who not only allowed me to edit their articles but also agreed to revise them repeatedly first at my request and then on the basis of the detailed comments made by an anonymous reviewer. Special thanks go to Professors Sudha Pai and Ashok K. Pankaj who could not actually attend the conference but readily offered their articles on request. Over the years, a special bond has developed among us all state politics *wallahs*, meeting each other frequently during conferences and project workshops, sharing ideas through e-mail.

A colleague in the department, Dr Kailash K. K., has been intimately associated with the volume — in organising the conference, coordinating with the participants, presenting a paper, and also preparing abstracts of some of the article. Over the years, he has become more a dear friend than merely an accomplished fellow traveller in the arena of Indian politics. I am also grateful to my two other colleagues Dr Ronki Ram and Dr Pampa Mukherjee for not only contributing articles for the volume but also encouraging me in the endeavour. Professor Sanjay Chaturvedi, Dr Deepak K. Singh, Dr Navjot and Ms Janaki Srinivasan, all dear colleagues in the department, have always been supportive in creating a congenial environment in the department for academic pursuits. Professor Bhupinder Brar, the ‘Bhishmapitamah’ of the department, has been the guiding force for all of us. While collecting reading material to write the Introduction for the volume, I received valuable help from Paramjit Singh, the office superintendent of the UGC-SAP and ASIHSS-assisted departmental library. This is also a befitting occasion to recall with immense pride the rich legacy that our department, amongst the oldest and finest in the country, has enjoyed over decades in the form of seminal contributions made in the discipline of state politics, especially by Professors T. R. Sharma, P. S. Verma and late Pradeep Kumar. I would be failing in my duty if I do not thank the students at the department who opted for the course on state politics for continued and productive engagements I have had with them in the classroom and outside.

I wish to thank the editorial board of the *Economic and Political Weekly*, especially Rammanohar Reddy, for providing me space and for constructive suggestions on the articles I have published in the journal. My two chapters in the volume draw heavily from the articles published in the journal in recent years.

I also wish to place on record my appreciation of the keen interest shown by Routledge, New Delhi in this volume and am thankful to the Routledge team for their suggestions, support and extremely efficient and friendly handling of the manuscript.

Finally, I must thank my family — my wife Vibha and children Ishita and Siddharth for being a constant source of great support and sustenance.

I dedicate the volume to my parents who gave their all to us children without asking anything in return.

Introduction — Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions within Regions

ASHUTOSH KUMAR

Recent India has been witness to the onset of the democratic processes that have resulted in the reconfiguration of its politics and economy. Among these processes, most significant has been the assertion of identity politics. There have been struggles around the assertiveness and conflicting claims of the identity groups, and of struggles amongst them, often fought out on lines of region, religion, language (even dialect), caste, and community. These struggles have found expressions in the changed mode of electoral representation that has brought the local/regional into focus with the hitherto politically dormant groups and regions finding voices. Emergence of a more genuinely representative democracy has led to the sharpening of the line of distinction between or among the identity groups and the regions.

The process has received an impetus with the introduction of the new economic policies as the marginal groups as well as the peripheral regions increasingly feel left out with the centre gradually withdrawing from the social and economic sector and market economy privileging the privileged, be it the social groups or the regions.¹ Coastal states, linguistic ‘minority’ states, mineral rich states along with the high income ‘progressive’ states have benefited much more from the flow of foreign as well as indigenous private investment in contrast to the ‘laggard’ states having peripheral locations, disturbed law and order situation, poor economic and social infrastructure, unmanageable disparate territory and huge population lacking in terms of cultural capital, more often than not, belonging to linguistic ‘majority’ (Kurian 2000; Ahluwalia 2000; Kohli 2006; Sengupta and Kumar 2008). Regional inequalities within the states in terms of income and consumption have been widening. Inter-state as well as intra-state disparities have grown

¹ Few peripheral regions, which are the hotspots of economic reform, are in the throes of the people’s movement, as the locals feel they are being taken for a ride by both the government and the multinationals in the name of development.

faster in the post-reforms period.² What may be called the ‘secession of the rich’,³ even the rich states, attracting huge private investments and registering impressive growth, have started resenting the continued dependence of relatively underdeveloped states on the central revenues transferred to them. While the relatively developed states complain of ‘reverse’ discrimination, the peripheral regions of the some of these states complain of being victim of ‘internal colonialism’.

The above processes have significantly contributed to the regionalisation of polity with the regional states emerging as the prime arenas where politics and economy actually unfold.⁴ There has been a marked increase in the capacity of the states to influence their own development performance as the idea of ‘shared sovereignty’ takes over (Bagchi 2008: 45). Development or not, it is now the state level vernacular elites, more often than not belonging to the hitherto dormant identity groups in post-Mandal India, who influence or make the critical policy decisions and whose choices actually affect economic and political happenings in their respective states and also at the centre while participating in the coalition governments that have become regular feature in the last seven Lok Sabha elections. This has led to the decline of the politics of patronage, prevalent during the ‘Congress system’. Regional/state level parties now negotiate with the dominant coalition-making national party for crucial portfolios that allows them to bring in investments in their regions or they simply

² Calling the post-reform period ‘a period of growth with inequality’, Nagaraj has observed that the so-called growth of the Indian economy ‘has favoured urban India, organised sector, richer states and property owners, against rural India, unorganised sector, poorer states and wage earners ... India’s growth process during the last two decades does not seem to have been a virtuous one — it has polarised the economy’ (Nagaraj 2000: 2831).

³ ‘If the growth prospects of the nation get tied to the degree of success in enticing direct foreign investments, then the richer regions feel that they would be better placed in this regard if they acted on their own, unencumbered by the burden of belonging to the same country as the poor, violent, crime-infested regions’ (Patnaik 2000: 153).

⁴ In electoral terms, there have been two indicators that stand out among others, in the context of the regionalisation argument. One, the representation of the state-level parties in the legislative bodies has increased to the level that it appears that the national polity is little more than the aggregation of the regional. Two, the national parties have increasingly adopted state-specific electoral campaigns and policies.

bargain for the better financial allocation for their own states/regions in return of their political support even when they impart outside support. The electorates, therefore, do not hesitate any longer to vote for the parties pursuing aggressive regional agenda for fear of neglect of their region.

A study of the micro-level mechanisms, which are shaping political actions and processes of mobilization at local level, has therefore now become imperative for an understanding of the internal dynamics of Indian politics and economy as well as for drawing the theoretical conclusions on a larger canvas. There has been a growing realization that it is at the state level that the 'future analyses of Indian politics must concentrate' (Chibber and Nooruddin 1999).

Greater level of recognition of state as the primary unit of analysis has led to the emergence of state politics as an autonomous discipline, whose study is now being considered essential for a nuanced understanding of Indian politics. Ironically, the newfound exalted status of the discipline is in sharp contrast to its earlier dismal state not long ago when it was treated merely as an appendage of the discipline of Indian politics (read 'national politics').

The lack of autonomy of the discipline of state politics at the time could be primarily attributed to three factors.

First, within the grand comparative analytical framework developed by the liberal schools of political modernisation and political development to study the developing societies that dominated the 'third world' political theory, the newly independent nation states were considered as the prime movers in terms of economy and politics and therefore were taken as the fundamental units of analysis. In the quest of reaching about a general theory that would have near universal application (recall stage theory of growth), the constituent units within the nation state and their historical specificities were completely ignored. Quite a few Indian political theorists, under the spell of the American Political Science Association, followed suit. As for the Marxist writings on Indian politics, it remained under the spell of neo-Marxist critique in the form of underdevelopment/dependency/world systems that again undertook the 'post-colonial state' as the unit of analysis (Chatterjee 2010: 6–7).

Second, due to the prevalence of what used to be called the 'Congress system', the politics and economy (refer the development planning model) at the state level at the time was very much guided by the 'dominant centre', with the 'high command' pulling the key

strings of power. State politics thus appeared merely as ‘a poor copy’ of the politics unfolding at the national level.

Third, in the then euphoria of ‘Nehruvian era’, when the whole emphasis was on achieving ‘institution building/ state building/ nation-building’ under the leadership of a nationalist and modernising state elite that commanded tremendous degree of confidence and legitimacy, it was inevitable that politics at the state level would be studied from the ‘national perspective’ even if at the cost of missing the ‘esoteric details’ concerning the regional states (Yadav and Palshikar 2006). Arguably, there was an all-pervading feeling shared by the intelligentsia of the time that ‘too much attention to state affairs’ was a ‘mark of parochial attachments’.⁵

The defining moment for the discipline came in the form of the general elections held in 1967 which marked the beginning of the veering away of different states, at different points of time and through different ways, from the ‘Congress system’ (Kothari 1970). The grudging recognition of the states, once considered the bane of Indian unity, as the ‘mainstay of India’s democracy and the crucial building block of the Indian nation’ (Mitra 2006: 46), also facilitated the emergence of state politics as a discipline in its own right. Consequently, the next two decades that followed saw the publication of the volumes on state politics edited by Weiner (1968), Narain (1976), Wood (1984) and Frankel and Rao (1990).

Falling in to what one may consider now as belonging to somewhat ‘outmoded’ genre of writings, the first three edited volumes, mentioned above, included state-specific articles that were basically focused on enumerating the determinants of the state level political dynamics in great empirical details. For the scholars contributing to these volumes, regional states provided more or less self-contained universe (called ‘microcosm’ as well as ‘macrocosm’ by Weiner 1968: 4) within which their politics (mainly electoral) were conducted and analysed. Based on state-specific empirical details about the political history, the politico-administrative structure, changing patterns of political participation, the nature of party system and the performance of the political regimes; the articles presented descriptive analyses of the nature and dynamics of the political processes in the particular states. Employing a political

⁵ Significantly, Weiner justified the need to undertake ‘political research’ on Indian states by suggesting that it was at the state level that the ‘conflicts among castes, religious groups, tribes, and linguistic groups and factions are played out’ and which hampers efforts ‘to modernize’ (Weiner 1968: 6).

sociological approach, which was hugely inspired by the modernisation theory literature, the articles essentially privileged the 'political' while relatively ignoring the 'economic'.

The two volumes edited by Rao and Frankel, however, belonged to a somewhat different genre, much more in tune with the then emergent trend in the study of state politics, as the articles focused on the historical patterns of political transformation taking place in particular states. The varying relationship between caste and class in the states, especially in terms of land question, came up in several articles for theoretical inquiries while trying to unravel the problematic of 'the decline of dominance' of the traditional elites in the rural hinterlands. Limiting their analysis to a specific state, the articles in the two volumes could not explore the variation in intensity of the caste-based cleavage structures across the states as the other backward caste (OBC)/middle peasant caste coalition had emerged more powerfully in some states in comparison to other states, especially in the northern Indian states at the time of writing those articles. About the pattern of politicisation and mobilisation of the peasant and the OBC castes across the regional states of India, an edited volume by Omvedt (1982) again has state-specific articles that fail to take advantage of systematic comparative analysis.

In tenor with the then prevailing trend, all the edited volumes, mentioned above and others, contained articles that focused on one state. There was hardly any effort on the part of the contributors to use their state-specific studies for building up a larger argument about the emergent nature of Indian politics across the states. Almost all of them studiously avoided employing a comparative inter-state framework or developing a theoretical framework for their empirical analyses.⁶

⁶ The volume edited by John Wood (1984) did have a comparative article by Roderick Church. Based on a study of the emergent caste politics of the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat, Church came up with an argument that is relevant even today. He argued that at the time, among the different landowning twice-born upper castes, the farming middle/intermediate castes, the landless agricultural as well as the service and artisan lower castes and the Scheduled Castes, it was the lower castes, numerically weak and dispersed and sandwiched between the middle and the ex-untouchable castes which were facing resistance and even an attempt at co-optation of their leadership by the upper and middle 'dominant' castes whenever they sought a larger share in political processes. Church argued, with a sense of prescience, that the 'lower castes are the last stratum to be brought into politics' (Church 1984: 231).

How can one explain the marked reluctance on the part of the political analysts to employ the comparative framework while undertaking the study of state politics? The 'segmented nature of polity' and variegated nature of society besides extreme fluidity in the nature of state politics were often cited as the two main reasons as to why the advantages of comparative studies across the states could not be adequately explored (Pai 2000: 2).⁷ Also, compared to national politics, local politics was considered as limited in nature. Commonalities, if any, discernable in the nature of emerging trends in the state politics, were ignored as only the distinctive features received attention.

Attempts to employ comparative method in the arena of state politics could gain some momentum as late as in the late 1980s. Kohli (1987), one of the earliest comparativists, argued that India constituted a 'laboratory for comparative political analysis' in the sense that despite having many states with quite diverse politics, the fact remains that these states are within the same 'framework of Indian federalism' and therefore present ideal type conditions for 'controlled experiments'.

The burgeoning literature that has come up on the subject since then can broadly be categorised into three categories. The first category would include studies that focus in depth on a single state, but use the concrete analysis to underpin larger theoretical arguments that can be applied elsewhere in India, something that was not attempted earlier. Most of these studies, however, are not comparative in nature. The writings that stand out include those of Singh (1992), Subramanian (1999), Hasan (1998), Baruah (1999), Kumar (2000a), Behera (2001), Prakash (2002), Jaffrelot (2003) and Kudaisya (2006).

Studies on the nature of electoral politics at the state level based on CSDS–Lokniti- conducted national election studies (NES) survey data would fall into second category. These 'theoretically sensitive studies' are distinguishable from most of the writings on state electoral politics, which are either in the genre of 'mindless empiricism' or are in the

⁷ Writing in the late 1970s, Narain referred to the fact that we had 'to deal here not with one pattern but with several patterns of state politics which (were) emerging, if at all, through none too steady pull and swing of politics at the central and state levels' (Narain 1976: xvi).

form of ‘impressionistic theorisations’ (Nigam and Yadav 1999). These academic efforts have been enabling in the sense that they aim at an understanding of the larger forces and long-term changes taking place in the state party system and electoral politics during the ‘third phase of democratisation in India’ (Palshikar 2004: 1478).

A reading of the state-specific articles in this genre, written by the Lokniti network members for *Economic and Political Weekly*,⁸ reveal not only the basic determinants of electoral politics in the state like the demographic composition and nature of ethnic/communal/caste cleavages as well as other socio-political cleavages like the regional, rural–urban and caste–class linkages, but also present an analysis of the electoral outcomes highlighting differences in major issues raised in manifestos, emergent trends, alliance formations, seat adjustments, selection of candidates and campaigns and so on. The survey data⁹ helps the authors explain the opinions and attitudes of the electorates having different age, sex, caste, community, and class and education profiles. Going beyond merely the journalistic task of ‘counting the votes’/‘profiling the electoral behaviour’/‘assessing the gain of shift in support base’/ ‘predicting future political reconfigurations/realignments’, these articles do refer to the critical questions like: Did the voters have any real choice? Did the electoral politics have a real impact over public policies in relations to the substantive social and economic issues?

⁸ Refer two special issues of *Economic and Political Weekly*: one on the ‘National Election Study 2004’, 39 (51), 18–24 December 2004 and the other on ‘State Parties, National Ambitions’, 39 (14 & 15), 3–9 April 2004. Some of these articles have been included in an anthology of political parties (deSouza and Sridharan 2006) and in an edited volume that includes updated and revised versions of the articles along with three general articles providing the context of the analysis of state politics in India (Shastri et al. 2009). *Economic and Political Weekly*, in a special volume on the state elections, 2007–2008, published a set of state-specific commentaries on the Assembly elections accompanied by an article by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar that sets the context and provides an overview for comparative analysis (XLIV [6], 7–13 February 2009).

⁹ Some of the key information and analysis from the CSDS-NES data collection and surveys, in particular, appeared in a special issue of the *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, XV (1 & 2), 2003.

The articles mentioned above, written over a period of one and half decades and covering different state elections, confirm the extreme fluidity in the nature of electoral permutations and combinations that come to assume power at the central or state levels. They, however, also reveal that despite the region-specific nature of electoral politics and the emergence of distinct identities, emerging trends in Indian politics do reveal certain commonalities across the country, i.e., presence of electoral regions either as historically constituted or merely administrative ones; the emergence of electoral bipolarities; and the politicisation and mobilisation of the 'old, received, but hitherto dormant identities' (Kumar 2003: 3146).

Besides the state specific commentaries, there are also other important volumes/articles which do attempt to develop a coherent and a systematic theoretical framework based on NES data to make sense of the nature of electoral democracy in India (Yadav 1996; Chibber 1999; Mitra and Singh 1999; Palshikar 2004; Suri 2005; Yadav and Palshikar 2006, 2008, 2009;¹⁰ Heath et al. 2006; Varshney 2007). In the same *Lokniti* genre of studies falls the volumes edited by Hansen and Jaffrelot (2001) and Roy and Wallace (2003 and 2007).

In the third category would fall the studies that employ the inter-state comparative method to look for the commonalities and differences in the politics of two or more comparable states, and then armed with their findings, reflect and theorise on a broader canvass. These studies are based on the assumption that the regional states in India 'provide an ideal environment for the purpose of a comparative analysis, provided that the units are autonomous and homogeneous for the purpose of the study and the cases are selected in a manner that minimizes biases. Most of the literature in this category takes up the research questions related to one thematic area like the issue of governance or ethnicity and select purposely (and not randomly) the states as the sampling units to keep the study focused and also make comparison possible. The writings, based on inter-state comparative approach that have come up since the momentous decade

¹⁰ While emphasising the autonomy of state politics from national politics, Yadav and Palshikar (2008: 14–22) present a 'preliminary frame' for inter-state comparative analysis by presenting the critical issues for enquiry in the form of what they call the 'ten theses' on state politics in India.

of 90's include that of Kohli (1987),¹¹ Mawdsley (1998), Harriss (1999),¹² Varshney (2002),¹³ Jenkins (1999),¹⁴ Singh (2000), Chandra (2005), Yagnik and Sheth (2005), Sinha (2005),¹⁵ Mitra (2006),¹⁶ Jayal (2006) and Desai (2007).¹⁷

The widely acclaimed volume on state politics edited by Jenkins (2004), falls in the above genre of the studies, as the volume includes articles that employ the two-state comparative method to take up four sets of thematic areas, namely, economic policy making (Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu; West Bengal and Gujarat); subaltern

¹¹ Atul Kohli undertook an extensive field-based research to gauge the effectiveness of different party regimes in undertaking the anti-poverty measures. Based on the principle of purposive selection, Kohli selected three case studies where poverty alleviation policies had achieved the maximum (West Bengal governed by the Left Front) or the minimum success (Uttar Pradesh governed by the Janata coalition), and the third one that fell into the middle category (Karnataka governed by the Congress with Devraj Urs as the Chief Minister). The difference of the 'regional distributive outcomes' in terms of pro-poor measures were 'function of the regime controlling political power', as party-dominated regimes in India 'closely reflects the nature of the ruling political party. The ideology, organization and class alliances underlying a party dominated regime are then of considerable consequence' (Kohli 1987: 10).

¹² Like Kohli, Harriss also employed a comparative framework to take up a policy study seeking to explain differential poverty reducing performance across states. For the purpose, Harriss revisited the state-specific articles in the Frankel and Rao volume after a gap of a decade to show as to how the differences in terms of balance of caste/class power and also in terms of the party systems in different states influence the policy process and the performance of the states. He argued that that in the states where the 'power of the locally dominant castes/classes has been challenged to a great extent' or where 'stable, relatively well-institutionalized parties compete for their votes' have done comparatively better in terms of poverty reduction (Harriss 1999: 3367–3376).

¹³ Varshney (2002) combines an inter-state focus with an advocacy of taking up city as his unit of analysis for the study of communal riots involving the Hindus and the Muslims as he argues that the communal riots are urban phenomena in India. In the following years, Brass (2003) and Wilkinson (2004) also analysed episodes of ethnic violence in post-colonial India using city as the unit of their analyses. While Varshney had worked with three sets of paired cities, Brass took only one city and Wilkinson cities/constituencies for their field studies.

¹⁴ Jenkins, while making a comparative study of the politics of economic reforms in the states of Rajasthan and Maharashtra, offers valuable insights in the political management of the reform process by virtue of employing India's federal

politicisation (Bihar and Orissa; Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan); civic engagement (Kerala and Uttar Pradesh); and political leadership studies (Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu). Picking up threads from Kohli's notion of India as a 'laboratory of democracy', Jenkins refers to the 'robust form of federalism' that enables the political analysts

structure as an institutional framework for a quasi-laboratory of competing policies and as an enabling structure aiming at providing incentives for policy innovation.

¹⁵ In her study of the politics of economic policy in the 'large and multileveled polity', Sinha focuses on the 'dominant puzzle' of the 'failed developmental state' in India, namely as to why despite supposedly following a uniform developmental trajectory marked by uniform central policy interventions and regulations under the development planning model for so long, whose remnants are still visible, the regional states in India have come to reveal very different developmental outcomes. More intriguingly, why there has been an uneven regional pattern of investment flow in those regional states even where historical and economic explanations might suggest convergence (she selects Gujarat and West Bengal as case studies). Why has West Bengal, unlike Gujarat (and Tamil Nadu that had none of the initial advantages), failed to attract a higher share of investment on the basis of its initial strengths as a private capital-intensive state? The explanation, Sinha suggests, lies in the form of the differing 'institutional and political capacities' of the states. See Sinha (2004 and 2005).

¹⁶ Subrata K. Mitra (2006: 43). In another instance of purposive sampling Mitra, for his comparative study that aimed at measuring the level of governance in India, selected six states from the 'four corners of India' as the research sites where either the level of governance was perceived as low (Punjab and Bihar), high (West Bengal and Maharashtra) or the ones that fell into the middle category (Tamil Nadu and Gujarat).

¹⁷ Desai, while using a two-state comparative perspective, raises the question as to why despite being ruled by the same left parties, Kerala has experienced much better success than Bengal in bringing about most substantive anti-poverty reforms. The explanation, she suggests, after comparing the historical state legacies, the role of the left-party formation and mode of insertion in civil society in the two states, is that Kerala has fared better due to its relative advantage in terms of greater 'strength of subordinate class mobilization and associationalism combined with a strong left presence, both parliamentary as well as extra-parliamentary'.

A formulation which would have wider implication for development studies in a vibrant democracy like India, Desai argues, is that a 'dynamic, synergistic relationship between parties and movements' can only 'sift political power in ways that substantially reduce poverty or achieve comprehensive development' (Desai 2007: 19, 23).

to undertake a comparative analysis of the politics of India's '29 mini democracies' that have 'almost identical institutional infrastructures' and that operate under similar 'economic policy framework and the legal protections enshrined in the Indian constitution'. Desai, another comparativist, also views India as an 'ideal ground for comparative analysis' as it holds 'constant certain factors such as its position in the sphere of international relations, geography, ecology, religion and early political formations' which, in turn, provide 'a range of variations in key social, political and economic pre-conditions and outcomes' in its different regional states (Desai 2007: 22–23).

Assertion of Regions within Regions

Notwithstanding the impressive range of studies on state politics that have come up in the last decade, there has been a dearth of literature that focuses on the regions within the states or employs an intra-state or inter-state regional perspective in a comparative mode. This is despite the fact that cultural heterogeneity of the regions within the states over the years has been sharpened as a result of the unevenness of development and unequal access to political power in a centralised federal political economy (Sathyamurthy 2000: 33).¹⁸

As a consequence, India's federal ideology has registered a marked shift as regional identity, culture and geographical difference now appear to be better recognised as a valid basis for administrative division and political representation. No wonder then that the recent decades have been witness to the assertion of well defined geographically, culturally and historically constituted distinct regions that have emerged within the states, showing sharpened ethnic/communal/caste as well as other social-political cleavages like the regional and rural-urban ones.¹⁹

The newly found assertion of the regions received an impetus in the wake of the creation of the three new states of Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand carved out from the parent states of Madhya Pradesh,

¹⁸ While asked to prioritise their loyalty in the NES conducted by CSDS-Lokniti in 1996 and 1999, 53.4 and 50.7 per cent of the respondents respectively expressed their first loyalty to region rather than to India whereas only 21.0 and 21.4 per cent respectively put their loyalty first to India than to region.

¹⁹ Interestingly, there are a few studies that compare the politics of the specific regions in India with that of a region of another country, mainly focusing on the identity-based politics (Bose 1999).

Uttar Pradesh²⁰ and Bihar respectively in November 2000 (Jayal 2000; Krishna 2000; Kumar 2000a).²¹ Significantly, this new wave of reorganisation was supported by all parties, in particular, by the two parties with nearly all-India presence, i.e. the Congress and the BJP, which could be attributed to the interests of the two parties in the highly competitive political environment, marked by the declining ability of any one party to win power at the centre on its own in the last seven general elections and also the concomitant rise of regional/state level parties in the 'post-Congress polity' reflecting the regional concerns about language, cultural identity, political autonomy and economic development. What also helped the cause was the fact that 'ethnic communities in the three new states were unconnected with foreign enemies or cross border nationalities' (Chadda 2002: 46–47).

The qualitative shift in the thinking about the territoriality of a region is visible in the way demand for a 'homeland of one's own' has become a 'permissible' issue for party agendas creating a new 'field of opportunities' for regions demanding statehood (Mawdsley 2005). Debates over territorial reorganisation have re-entered 'mainstream' political discussion after remaining a taboo for a long period, especially during the centralising and personalising leadership that took over after Nehru when assertions of regional identity were essentially viewed with suspicion and were stigmatised as parochial, chauvinist and even anti-national. Arguably, such apprehension is not evident in the Constitution which provides for a great degree of flexibility given to the Parliament under Article 3 to decide the bases on which new states are to be created, i.e., geography, demography, administrative convenience, language, ethnicity (read tribalism) or culture. Such constitutional flexibility has not only allowed for the accommodation

²⁰ Holding the creation of Uttaranchal as a positive step, Kudaisya has gone to the extent of suggesting further break-up of UP into regional states as due to its self- image of being 'a buffer to contain the linguistic principle as the basis for statehood', the state has 'failed to develop a regional identity of its own' (Kudaisya 2006: 411–14).

²¹ Significantly Ambedkar, one of the architects of the Indian Constitution, had long argued in favour of the creation of present day Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in his writings. Ambedkar's consistent support for the creation of new states emanated from 'his democratic impulse to accord political and cultural recognition to the term region, otherwise defined predominantly in a geographical spatial sense' (Sarangi 2006: 151).

of regional aspirations in the past but has also provided an incentive for ongoing political projects aimed at looking for the exit options for the regions within regions.

Apart from much greater acceptance of the ‘demos-enabling’ feature of the Constitution (Stepan 2001: 315–61), yet another kind of shift is visible in the way the new states are now being proposed on the grounds of good governance and development rather than on the language principle that has, ostensibly, guided state formation in the past (Brass 1994). Even the dialect communities have been asking for their own state while underlining the cultural and literary distinctiveness and richness of the dialect.

In a changed mode of electoral representation that has ushered in the ‘third wave of democracy’, newer and smaller states are also being viewed as more suited to provide for better representation of the electorates’ preferences in the composition of government as when they are part of the same state, the smaller regions’ electorates tend to vote strategically to elect representatives with preferences more closely aligned to the bigger region. The electorates no longer have to make a trade-off.

With the centre agreeing in principle to consider the demand for the creation of a separate Telangana state in December 2009, old and new demands for redrawing the boundaries of the states have been coming up thick and fast with increased intensity including those of Coorg in Karnataka, Mithilanchal in Bihar, Saurashtra in Gujarat, Gorkhaland and Kamtapur in West Bengal, Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Saurashtra in Gujarat, and then Harit Pradesh, Purvanachal, Braj Pradesh and Awadh Pradesh in Uttar Pradesh, Maru Pradesh in Rajasthan, Bhojpur comprising areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, Bundelkhand comprising areas of UP and MP, and a Greater Cooch Behar state out of the parts of Assam and West Bengal.

Under the emerging political landscape, there has been an imperative need to analyse the politics and economy of these newly assertive regions as they aspire to emerge in the near future as the arena where the political and economic choices and decisions would be made and unmade. Taking up the regions within the states as a distinctive analytical category and employing of a comparative method for in-depth analysis would thus ensure that the ‘smaller’ but significant pictures/narratives are not lost amidst the larger ones as happened not long ago within the discipline of Indian politics.

A Methodological Note

As a note of caution, for a comparativist, the task of comparing disparate political phenomena represented by the mushrooming regions in a complex diverse society like India would not be easy. Adopting a highly localised approach to bring out regional distinctiveness invariably involves the in-depth study of an entire range of factors that make a political situation in the way it exists. To avoid oversimplified generalisation, a comparativist working on India would do well to undertake concrete analysis of specific situations in two or more regions that are highly localised and issue-specific (say the regional movements demanding separate statehood in different parts of India) and then look for the differences and not merely adding up the similarities. In a major advantage of employing a region-based approach, it would not only enable the comparativists to re-frame the whole debate but to interrogate the cogency of conventional formulations, often derived from an analysis that took the regional state as the unit of analysis.

As regions within the states, to re-emphasise, are not merely politico-administrative instituted constructs but are also imagined or constituted, among others, in historical, geographic, economic, sociological or cultural terms, any meaningful comparative study of the regions would naturally straddle the disciplinary boundaries of social sciences. An amalgamation of political sociological and political economy approaches would thus encourage social analysts from different disciplines and not merely from political science to unravel the complexity of the emergent nature of regional politics.

About the Volume

This volume has been inspired by the idea mentioned above to attempt micro studies of the politics and economy of the states/regions in terms of their specificities. With the focus on the twin issues of identity and development that are often signifiers of the unravelling politics in the federal polity, the articles in the volume make a concerted attempt to look at and also beyond the states by exploring the particularities of the regions within these states in a comparative mode from the vantage point of democratic politics as it unfurls in recent India. The same agenda guides the articles that employ two-state comparative framework.

The first three articles in the volume take up the study of the three newly created states of Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh. The three states have been products of the identity-based regional movements for separate statehood masking their heterogeneity primarily due to the shared nature of popular perception about their ethno-cultural and geographical marginalities — Uttarakhand because of its mountainous topography and *pahari* identity, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh because of their large tribal population. The three states, despite being rich in terms of natural resources, were also victims of the neglect and discrimination by their parent states' governments and the state elites belonging to other regions of their parent states. The three articles underline the critical need to take into consideration, while formulating developmental policies, the complex reality of the process of identity formation and the continued and growing presence of the regions within what was supposed to be a culturally homogeneous territorial homeland of the agitating masses.

Seeking an alternative assessment of developmental imbalances, Amit Prakash, in his article on Jharkhand, argues for a critical need to undertake a socio-political redefinition of a 'region' rather than relying on the traditional spatial/geographical definitions. Based on an analysis of the available datasets for the tribal population in Jharkhand, Prakash observes that despite concerted public policy efforts for 'development' of the tribal population spanning over more than half a century, for the tribal community, realisation of right to socio-economic development remains still a distant dream. Part of the reason behind such abysmal levels of development outputs, he suggests, is privileging the spatial definition of the region, which conceals gross disparities at the local level in the realisation of these goals.

Besides, the spatial definition of the region also leads to a rather homogenised development policy in which the socio-cultural requirements of the different social groups concerned have found no space. For instance, the questions of rights to land, forest, displacement and rehabilitation (in addition to the issues of literacy, health and employment) are central elements for the realisation of the socio-economic rights of the tribal community but the mainstream development theory considers violations of rights to land, water, forests and displacement as costs of 'development'. The essential characteristics of a particular socio-cultural societal group have come under threat. This, in turn, poses a challenge to the legitimacy of the state, hence defeating part of the purpose of 'development'.

The need to rethink the notion of region at a theoretical level recurs in the article on Chhattisgarh by Dharmendra Kumar. His article suggests that a region is not a static but a dynamic entity, which tends to constantly evolve and whose forms change in accordance with the human activities. These evolutions are a dialectical product of the socio-geographical reality and its interactions with material processes (such as those related to modernity and most recently to globalisation), under whose influence the region becomes a concrete reality at a particular historical juncture. In this way, region gets integrated with its own socio-geographical specificities. Such integration may also lead to the beginning of a movement politics of resistance and stretch a thread of integration at that level as has happened with Chhattisgarh with the arrival of the global capital in the region. While referring to the working-class movements in Chhattisgarh, Kumar suggests that the specificities of a region may result in development of a common ground for transformative politics with radical potential in the region.

The limitation of the policies of development also figures in the third article of this section. Pampa Mukherjee, in her article, traces the movement for the separate statehood of Uttarakhand to the historical experiences of discrimination and exploitation of the local pahari communities by the parent state of Uttar Pradesh. The neglect of the hilly regions of Kumaon and Garhwal helped in bridging the divide of mutual conflict and hostility between the people of the two regions and prepared the ground for a concerted movement for Uttarakhand.

Mukherjee's essay is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the region and while doing so also provides the backdrop in which assertion of regional identity took place in Uttarakhand region. In this context, she refers to the stark insensitivity and neglect to this hilly region displayed by policy planners. The second part deals with the movement politics for separate statehood, which created an appropriate environment for the forging of a common Uttarakhandi identity. This identity, in turn, was instrumental in crystallising the idea of a separate state at the popular level. Drawing upon her study of the Uttarakhand movement, Mukherjee, in the third part of her article, suggests that demands for statehood in various regions of India indicate a growing political consciousness and assertion of hitherto marginalised and discriminated sections of the population for autonomous political space to articulate the needs and concerns of their respective regions.

The second section of the volume includes the articles that refer to the regions that have been witness to the identity based demands for separate statehood/territorial homeland or autonomy, as mentioned above. Region-specific articles are complemented with a two-state comparative article that takes up an analysis of the politics of autonomy in the two borderland states of Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.

A reading of the region-specific articles reveal as to how there has been a shift in the bases of demands for the separate statehood in recent India. Once based primarily on the cultural–linguistic basis, now the mobilisation and subsequent assertion of an identity group for separate statehood or grant of regional autonomy emerges out of the aspiration for greater share in political and economic powers in a resource-scarce economy. Despite the democratic promise on the contrary, cultural heterogeneity of the regions within the states over the years has been sharpened as a result of the non-fulfilment of the federal promise of evenness of development and equal access to political power. In this context, we can add that colonial patterns have not only persisted but have got intensified in post-colonial India. The trend has received an impetus under new economic policies that put one state against another and even one region against another within a state clamouring for investments in a competitive mode.

While referring to the separatist/subregional movements in different parts of Karnataka, their social composition, nature and the larger politics, the cultural nuances and differences among them, Muzaffar Assadi, in his article, focuses mainly on the movement for separate statehood for Coorg in the Kodagu region. In a comparative mode, Assadi argues that the demand for separate statehood for Coorg draws from the meta-narratives of history and contemporary political economy of binary oppositions of development and deprivation. He refers in this context to the contradictions prompted by the changes in the local economy due to the process of globalisation and also the self-articulation of the Coorgis as a culturally dislocated and de-ethnised category.

The argument that the regional imbalance in terms of development and sharing of political power triggers on the demand for a separate political space occurs in Arun K. Jana's article. Jana refers to the ethnic demand for separate statehood in the regions of Gorkhaland in the predominantly hill district of Darjeeling and the concurrent demand for a separate state of Kamtapur comprising of the six northern districts in

the plains of North Bengal. He attributes it to the economic neglect of the indigenous communities of the North Bengal region, which enables local ethnic organisations like the Gorkha National Liberation Front, the two factions of the Kamtapur People's Party and, more recently, the Greater Coochbehar People's Association to mobilise the people around the separate statehood agenda.

The local resentment, Jana argues, gets exacerbated also because of three other reasons. First, it is because of the difference in terms of language and culture between the marginal indigenous ethnic groups and the dominant Bengali settler community. Indigenous ethnic groups are marginal also in social terms as they largely belong to the category of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Second, the erosion of democracy due to the usage of the aggressive tactics for capturing and controlling institutions within the region by the CPM led Left Front has further alienated the indigenous groups. Moreover, the left has moved away from class politics, the politics that brought it to power in the state in 1977. Third, the absence of an organised kind of opposition that can aggregate and articulate the interests and demands of these disparate ethnic groups in the formal legislative forum has pushed the people towards the movement politics bordering on violence, which is gaining in terms of stridency.

Rama Rao Bonagani, in his article, evaluates and analyses the role of socio-economic, cultural and political factors, which have rekindled the demand for separate statehood in the Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh. He refers to the process of economic reform undertaken in recent years that has accentuated the process of regionalisation of identity politics in a relatively underdeveloped Telangana, as regional imbalances increase with investments going to the prosperous coastal Andhra region. Significantly, the statehood demand is also entwined with the popular demand for the redressal of the social and cultural grievances of the people like the rewriting of a separate history of the region so that the cultural distinctiveness of the region may be recognised. The political opportunism resorted to by the parties for short-term electoral gains, especially in the present era of coalition politics, has been another contributory factor.

The uniqueness of the movement for separate statehood for Harit Pradesh, as Jagpal Singh argues in his article, lies in the fact that unlike the other regions in Uttar Pradesh, namely Bundelkhand, Poorvanachal and Ruhelkhand, from where similar demands for separate statehood keep cropping up intermittently, it is not the underdevelopment but

the comparative prosperity of the region that is being projected as the basis for the region being a victim of 'reverse discrimination'/'internal colonialism' at the hands of the successive state governments. The movement's leadership claims that the north-western region is not only being neglected but, what is worse, its resources are being exploited for the betterment of the other regions of the state. The movement has received an impetus as the region grapples with its own set of agrarian and social crises that can respectively be attributed to the implementation of the WTO regime and the assertion of the subalterns against the dominance of the Jat landed peasantry. Ironically, in the absence of a visible mass movement, it is the electoral factor that gives a semblance of hope at the moment to the protagonists of the movement like Ajit Singh, leader of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RJD).

Writing in the context of India's northeast region, consisting of the 'seven sisters' states (and now joined by Sikkim), Samir Kumar Das situates identities in the newly emergent terrain of democratic politics in India and discusses the question with particular reference to the ongoing demand for the creation of linguistic states like Bodoland in the region. In order to push his argument, Das refers to what he calls a democratic paradox, namely, while identity plays a role in broadening the country's democratic base and making it part of the public agenda of rights by way of trying to disperse the hegemony of identity of the constituent states, it too has its own limits, especially when it comes to the question of reproducing and sustaining democracy. For one cannot stick to one's identity beyond the threshold while seeking democracy and justice.

It follows that identity politics is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of democracy building although there is no denying that continuous non-recognition of injustice and deficit of democracy only create and complicate problems for it. Das shows as to how the social divisions based on such identities as gender and ethnicity have been getting incorporated into the public agenda of rights and justice in the struggle against the accretion of identities, aided and facilitated by the linguistic reorganisation of states growing apace in the northeast region since the early 1960s.

Taking up the issue of identity politics in a comparative manner in the two neighbouring borderland states of Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, Ashutosh Kumar suggests that the assertion of identity politics based on religion or ethnicity, particularly in conjunction with territorial bases, has erroneously long been considered as posing a threat to the

Indian nation state. The reckless pursuit of the ‘hegemonised’ and ‘homogenised’ politics by the centralising and personalising political class in India, which refuses to acknowledge and accommodate the competing national and quasi-national identities and their demands, has been largely responsible for the politics of autonomy/*azadi* in the two states in recent times. As to why the movement in Kashmir continues unabated and Punjab remains ‘peaceful’ but disgruntled, Kumar attributes it to the kind of lopsided politics, pursued by the political class in ‘dealing’ with the autonomist/secessionist movements. It is a politics that is characterised by resort to coercion, economic populism, ad hoc-ism and cooperation (read co-option) with the ‘nationalist’ leadership (often locally discredited) in the form of accords, which are doomed to fail.

The third part of the volume refers to articles that take up identity politics in relation to caste politics in a particular region within a state or across states.

Reflecting on post-Mandal India, Rajeshwari Deshpande takes note of the rise and assertion of many new caste organisations representing numerically weak or hitherto dormant castes in state politics. She draws her evidence from her study of the nature of organisations of the ‘Lingayat’ caste in select towns of south Maharashtra and north Karnataka regions. Her article argues that Lingayat caste associations have gradually acquired a complex social identity as they oscillate between being a separate sect detached from Brahminical Hinduism and claiming the status of a dominant caste within the established caste hierarchy. The caste as a social group is differently placed in the political context of the two regions. It is in the context of these regional variations and also in the context of the complex social identity of the group that the Lingayat caste associations try to develop their own politics at the local level.

Deshpande’s account of the region-specific politics in the two neighbouring states reveals aspects of the changing role of caste associations that have wider implications. Her article provides insights into how a caste, both as a social and a political category, gets contextualised in the prism of the region, the various strategies that caste groups adopt for their effective mobilisation in the emergent competitive regional party systems and also how the changing political and social context at the regional level introduces serious limitations on caste-based identity politics. Two sets of larger issues are latent in the discussion carried out in the article. While an understanding of the

working of the caste associations gives us an opportunity to revisit the debates about the contemporary location of caste and its interaction with politics, at another level, it also raises important issues about the complex nature of patterns of identity politics shaping up across states and their regions.

In her article on the politics of the Dalit organisations in Tamil Nadu, Neeru Mehra primarily focuses on three related themes: the emergence of a separate Dalit consciousness and identity as distinct from the Dravidian identity; the form of assertion by Dalits in the state and their relation to the electoral politics; and the impact of the emergent Dalit organisations on state level politics.

Mehra underlines the fact that the caste system in Tamil Nadu has region-specific distinctive features. The *varna* system, for instance, is not relevant in Tamil Nadu as there is negligible presence of intermediate castes such as the Kammas and Reddis in the Andhra Pradesh or the Vokkaliggas and the Lingayats in Karnataka. As a result, the caste hierarchy in the state is very steep in the sense that the social distance between the Brahmins and the untouchable castes has traditionally been very wide. In a state where untouchability in its most virulent form has been a widespread phenomenon since the 8th century AD, recent decades have witnessed an upsurge of democratic consciousness among the Panchamas, as the Dalits are called, who have been critiquing the colonial construction of Dravidian identity on the plank of the non-Brahmanism. Mehra argues that non-Brahmanism as such was not aimed at the destruction of the caste system but was essentially a struggle for political power among the various social groups, which is still continuing and is reflected in the shifting contours of the party system.

With the increasing consciousness and changes in the configuration of the caste relations, both in the north and south Tamil Nadu regions Dalit self-assertion has taken varied forms, leading to greater caste conflict. In the domain of electoral politics, a two-fold phenomenon has manifested itself, which is fragmenting the state level party system. The first is the emergence in the late 1980s of the lower backwards led by the Vanniyars who have carved out a non-Brahmin identity distinct from the upper backwards, leading to the formation of the PMK. The second is the emergence of the large number of Dalit organisations, some of which now seem to be coalescing towards the formation of the party under the leadership of Krishnaswamy.

The democratic upsurge among the Dalits as a result of the widening and deepening of democracy has not only resulted into them taking on the upper and middle castes but also fighting it out among themselves. Sudha Pai's article, grounded in Andhra Pradesh, refers to the conflict between the Malas and the Madigas — two Dalit caste groups — over the sharing of the benefits of the governmental affirmative policies outcomes, and the demand by the latter that they should be provided separate quotas to safeguard their interests.

The Malas are found to a greater degree in the Circars or seven coastal districts that experienced colonial rule as part of the Madras Presidency, while the Madigas are more numerous in the nine Telengana districts that were part of the erstwhile Princely state of Hyderabad. In four districts of Rayalseema region, the proportion of both groups is about the same. The regional unevenness, due to historical reasons between the coastal and Telegana and Rayalseema regions, has relevance in Dalit politics. The Dalits of the coastal areas have experienced a number of social reform movements such as the non-Brahmin, Adi-Andhra, Christian missionary reform, rationalist and nationalist movements and as a result are ahead of the Dalits of Telangana. Significantly, the relative advance has acquired a caste dimension also as it is the Malas within the coastal districts and not the Madigas who have really benefited from colonial policy and activities of social reformers in the region and from ruling class politics of patronage and co-option after independence.

The Andhra case study, Pai argues, shows how the social and economic contexts in which the policies are implemented determine their impact. Contrary to the expectation of the constitution makers of India, who thought of creating a civil society by extending substantial citizenship rights to a vast section of historically deprived and marginalised groups, inequality of opportunities and ascriptive identities have failed to disappear. In actual practice, Pai suggests, these identities have become more marked with the appearance of new social and economic divisions between Dalits and non-Dalits and also among the marginal groups. The removal of discrimination and exclusion through equalization of opportunities, the principle on which affirmative actions were envisaged, are no longer significant today. Social groups are more into demanding division and extension of specific quotas to smaller groups.

Ronki Ram, in his article, has also made an attempt to bring out the regional specificities of the caste system in the context of Punjab while arguing that caste, though prevalent throughout the country,

has never been monolithic and unilinear in its practice as every region has its specific and unique characteristics that closely impact upon its socio-political and economic structures. What distinguishes the Doaba, Malwa and Majha regions of Punjab from other parts of India, Ram argues, are three-fold: first, the material factor of the caste-based discriminations in Punjab as against the purity–pollution syndrome that prevails in other parts of India. Second, Punjab is distinguished from other regions due to the near complete landlessness among the Dalits and the ‘absolute monopoly’ of the Jats (a dominant peasant caste) on the agricultural lands in the state. Third, the social measurement scale in Punjab is not based on the purity/pollution principle of Brahminical orthodoxy. Instead, it is based on the landholding, martial strength and allegiance to Sikhism, a comparatively new reformist religion that openly challenges the rituals and dogmatic traditions of Hinduism and Islam.

What connect the Dalits of Punjab having different religious allegiance to their counterparts in other regions of India is their continued marginality and also the beginning of their resistance against the structures of social oppression and economic deprivations. The spread of *deras* in recent times across the three regions, especially in Doaba and Malwa, should be viewed in this context.

The fourth part of the volume includes the articles that refer to the state electoral politics in India while emphasising the regional specificities of the politics of identity based contestation and representation. The common argument in these articles is that the states are essentially ‘instituted regions’ and not the ‘natural regions’, comprising of the numerous regions having their distinctive historical specificities, which continue to influence the political attitudes, party politics and electoral outcomes even in the modern times of ‘democratic upsurge’. In a way, the electoral politics has accentuated regional consciousness combining with other identities like caste and religion.

Sanjay Lodha’s article argues that Rajasthan is an artificially created geographic entity comprising of as many as nine regions rooted primarily to their traditional identities as princely states dating back to the colonial era. These regions retain their distinctiveness in terms of their social and developmental profiles. Drawing on the CSDS-NES data, Lodha argues that these regional identities still impinge upon the people’s perception about the political issues and also largely influence the nature of electoral competition and electorate’s choice in the state.

Karnataka, since its inception, has been witness to as many as nine Lok Sabha elections and seven Assembly elections, each one ushering in a new trend and triggering off a series of political developments of far reaching political significance. Sandeep Shastri, in his article, refers to a clear caste matrix, which impacts upon the nature of political competition and the expression of political choices across the regions in the state, namely, Old Mysore region, Hyderabad-Karnataka region, Bombay-Karnataka region and Coorg. Such a study enables us to understand the nature of political competition and the expression of political choices across its regions. Presenting empirical evidence, Shastri argues that the nature of electoral verdicts in Karnataka come across as a by-product of the regions-specific trends at the time especially in the form of the social coalitions that emerge in a particular region and the nature of the electoral context (bipolar or tri-polar) in the regions.

The fifth and last part of the volume includes an article that refers to the politics of the economic policies and their outcomes in the context of specific states.

Despite having experienced similar economic and demographic development features in the pre-reform period (pre-1991), Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, the two states of India have witnessed divergent trends in the post-reform period. Why? Ashok K. Pankaj, in his comparative article, attributes it to the different political (policy) responses to (reforms in) governance and development by the anti-reform regime of the RJD in Bihar and the reform-friendly Congress government of Digvijay Singh in Madhya Pradesh.

Pankaj argues that the RJD's attitude towards reform was conditioned by its ideological and political positions, its regional character, political agenda of governance, political-electoral constituency consisting largely of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Dalits, Muslims and the poor, absence of popular pressure and weak and divided opposition. On the other hand, economic and governance related reforms in Madhya Pradesh were facilitated by a political regime (the Congress), which had to work under the leadership and policy guidelines of the pro-reform central authority of the party (high command). Moreover, the then Congress regime was also under constraint to reform under pressure from a strong opposition that was supportive of the new economic policies. It helped the process that the state unit of Congress was desperately trying to regain its Dalit and OBCs vote banks by attractive packages.

Summing Up

A reading of the articles included in the volume enable us to go beyond states and look at the regions within the states as a distinctive analytical category for an in-depth study of the democratic politics of identity and development that is unfolding at the state levels. It is our argument that such micro-studies aimed at capturing the nuances, though somewhat challenging in nature, would further enrich the discipline of state politics in India.

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