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To Anu, Viri, and Prem

## Acknowledgments

This dissertation owes its greatest debt to the many respondents who agreed to participate in the focus groups, interviews, and surveys. It is their contribution that breathed life into this project.

My research was made possible by the support of many institutions in India and in the United States. During my fieldwork I benefited from the intellectual contributions and hospitality of The Madras Institute of Development Studies, the Giri Institute in Lucknow, and the Department of Political Science in Pune. The Center for the Study of Developing Societies became my home outside the University of Michigan. The Lokniti Program taught me much about survey research in India and shared its insights and data readily. My team of research assistants in India adapted to a grueling schedule and difficult situations. Without their dedication, this project could have been derailed on many occasions.

At the University of Michigan grants from the International Institute supported exploratory work for the dissertation, while the Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship and Telluride House Fellowship allowed me to focus on the writing of the dissertation. Dan Measel and Donna Hansen at the Services for the Students with Disabilities made sure that my books were scanned on time. This work benefited from the suggestions and questions offered by participants in the Comparative Politics Workshop at Michigan as well as the South Asian Politics Workshop at Berkeley. Friends and colleagues in the department read my work and suggested useful changes.

I will always remain deeply indebted to my committee members Ashutosh

Varshney, Pradeep Chhibber, Allen Hicken, Anna Grzymala-Busse, and Elizabeth Anderson for shepherding this project and suffering through numerous iterations of the argument, not to mention many chapter drafts. I am also grateful to Edie Goldenberg, Ronald Inglehart, and Vincent Hutchings for their invaluable advice and immense warmth.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation answers three questions: How is the mobilization of marginalized ethnic groups distinct from other groups? How do the social movements of a marginalized group impact its electoral mobilization by political parties? Why do ethnic parties of a marginalized group succeed in some cases, but fail in others? I study the democratic participation and mobilization of Dalits (former untouchables) across four large states in India – Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

The study design takes advantage of a natural experiment created by the early movements of Dalits in some states, but not in others. Variation in the electoral performance of Dalit political parties at a moment of opportunity marked by party system fragmentation across all the states enables an exploration of how historical Dalit movements impact the prospects of Dalit parties. Drawing on data from the Indian National Election Study and findings gathered through eighty focus groups and more than four hundred open-ended interviews during fourteen months of fieldwork, I demonstrate that prior social movements demanding social inclusion curtail the electoral success of Dalit-based political parties. Where historically Dalits were able to participate in social movements, political parties seeking their support began to mobilize them directly.

Consequently, historical movements opposing the principle of social hierarchy resulted in the early inclusion of Dalits into multiethnic parties. Conversely, the absence of movements prevented multiethnic parties from developing inclusive mobilization strategies; this preserved the opportunity for ethnic parties to mobilize the marginalized on the basis of their exclusion. The divergent paths through inclusive multiethnic

politics in some states and exclusive ethnic politics in others point towards different consequences for the quality of governance, in particular for the provision of public services.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This dissertation explains the patterns of democratic mobilization of a historically marginalized group. Specifically, I focus on the mobilization of Dalits (former untouchables) in India. In a period of political opportunity, marked by significant fragmentation of the party system, Dalits have been mobilized by their caste or ethnic parties across different states with varying degrees of success. I explore the paradox of why Dalit parties perform poorly in states historically home to movements demanding social equality while they do well in other states where such movements have been weak or entirely absent.

I demonstrate that prior social movements curtail the success of Dalit-based political parties. Historical movements that oppose the principle of social hierarchy alter political parties' ability to mobilize marginalized groups. This is because movement activity generates incentives for multiethnic parties seeking the support of these groups to acknowledge the issue of ethnic exclusion and its related disadvantages. Conversely, the absence of movements prevents multiethnic parties from developing inclusive mobilization strategies; this preserves the opportunity for ethnic parties to mobilize the marginalized on the basis of their exclusion.

*Dalit* is the name that India's former untouchables give themselves. The word means "ground down" or "broken to pieces." Dalits, who constitute 16 percent of India's population, are some of the country's most marginalized citizens. For the purpose of this dissertation, I define a group as marginalized if it meets the following three criteria: (1) it is for the large part poor; (2) historically, it has been discriminated

against by other groups because of its ascriptive identity; and (3) it is in a minority in the polity. I classify a political party as an ethnic party when a majority of its electoral support at the state level is provided by a particular ethnic group and the party is committed to working for the welfare of that ethnic group. In the same vein, a multiethnic party draws the majority of its support from multiple ethnic groups at the state level.

### ***Theoretical and Empirical Relevance***

Understanding the patterns of Dalit mobilization is important for both empirical and theoretical reasons. The existence of an ethnic group does not necessarily guarantee the success of its ethnic party. Why ethnic parties succeed in some cases but not in others thus remains an important question to answer. In a multiethnic democracy, too, the form ethnic politics takes can have far reaching effects.

Although parties are endemic to democracies, ethnic parties by their very nature pose a special challenge for democratic politics. By mobilizing citizens along ethnic cleavages, they can further polarize a society (Chandra 2004). When in power, by providing club or exclusionary goods instead of universal or public goods they can have long-term detrimental effects on the prospect of economic development, including human development (Keefer 2004).

Based on what we know from the literature on electoral institutions, a Single Member District Plurality (SMDP) electoral system coupled with dispersed ethnic groups typically discourages the success of ethnic parties. In this respect, the success of

ethnic parties in India potentially represents a case of institutional failure and requires explanation.

Ethnicity has been a means of social exclusion across many societies around the world. For excluded groups, lower social status often corresponds with their lower economic status. Even as societies historically ordered by ranked relationships between groups (Horowitz 1986) come to be governed democratically, members of excluded groups continually struggle to access the full panoply of their legal, political, and social rights. Despite this fact, outside the realm of American politics, the literature on ethnic politics has largely neglected the opportunity to understand how marginalization impacts participation and mobilization.<sup>1</sup> This is unfortunate as the mobilization of a historically marginalized group constitutes democratic deepening.

Ethnic parties that represent historically marginalized groups are a useful category of parties to study since they mobilize citizens with both low levels of political efficacy and either inaccessible or ineffective avenues of representation outside the electoral arena. It is critical to acknowledge the distinction between marginalized groups and other groups because ethnicity-based explanations for a variety of outcomes often times actually rely on the properties associated with ethnicity rather than on the ethnic identity itself (Chandra 2006).<sup>2</sup> For such explanations to be complete, these

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<sup>1</sup> The literature in ethnic politics does not usually make this distinction. A notable exception, however, is Varshney (2003), who draws a distinction between nationalism of exclusion and the nationalism of resistance. The former involves the enforcement of the values and norms of a dominant group onto a subordinate group. This enforcement results in the exclusion of the subordinate group from the portals of power. Hatred and condescension against a target group drives the nationalism of exclusion. Conversely, the nationalism of resistance involves the subordinate group standing up to the hegemony of the dominant group. Thus, dignity and self-respect drive the nationalism of resistance.

<sup>2</sup> Chandra (2006) has argued that the largest number of explanatory claims about ethnicity rest on properties that are not intrinsic to ethnic identities in general, such as fixedness, a common culture, and territorial concentration. She suggests, "As such, they cannot be taken as claims about the effect of ethnic identities in general...Rather than reading them to mean that ethnicity is associated with some

properties and their effects must be identified. Additionally, as this project will demonstrate, the mobilization of marginalized ethnic groups is qualitatively distinct in the goals it espouses and the forms it takes. For example, the mobilization of privileged ethnic groups can often take the form of the ‘politics of othering,’ involving the identification and vilification of an out-group. By contrast, the mobilization of a marginalized ethnic group seeks equality – the end of exclusion. Thus, the mobilization of marginalized groups takes the form of the ‘politics of self’ by building collective respect through the process of mobilization.

### ***Marginalization and Democratic Citizenship***

To understand how historical marginalization affects members of an ethnic group, it is essential to recognize the importance of the stigma attached to the group’s collective identity and the disadvantages arising from this stigma. Members belonging to marginalized groups such as the Roma in Eastern Europe, Dalits in India, African Americans in the United States, Afro-Brazilians in Brazil, Hazaras in Afghanistan, and Burakumin in Japan all have one thing in common: all have been subject to stigmatization in the past and continue to face it in one form or another. It is the societies rejecting these groups that make their situations distinct. For individuals belonging to marginalized groups, identity is dependent on the rejecting society; this identity has been assigned to them and they have no practical option of selecting another (Margalit 2003). They are caught in an identity trap.

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dependent variable Y, we should read them to mean either that a particular subset of ethnic identities are associated with dependent variable Y or that ethnicity, along with some other variable X, is associated with the dependent variable Y.” I treat historic marginalization as that associated variable X.

From a theoretical standpoint, members of a historically marginalized group have three unique attributes. First, they lack the means to escape the society that has stigmatized their identity. Second, this stigma forecloses the possibility of choosing alternate identities. Third, and most important, because their low social status correlates with poverty, these individuals are often unable to hold state institutions accountable for guaranteeing their citizenship-related rights.<sup>3</sup> These conditions do not afflict polity members who are in command of resources and do not belong to a stigmatized group. Hence, recognition (implying restoration of dignity to the collective identity and the removal of disadvantages accruing from the stigma) is a matter of high salience for members of historically marginalized groups. This is the first proposition for the construction of my argument. With its promise of political equality, democratic politics holds the possibility for marginalized citizens to mobilize and seek state intervention to address the disadvantages rooted in their lower social status.

Once a marginalized ethnic group is able to mobilize, its group mobilization can take two forms: a social or ethnic movement or a political party. This is the second proposition central to the explanation. While any form of mobilization of a marginalized ethnic group involves overcoming the internal and external constraints associated with marginalization, the opportunity shifts that enable the success of a movement and a party differ. Unlike a movement, ethnic party success is contingent on additional electoral opportunity. The sequencing of ethnic movements and ethnic parties creates a unique opportunity to study the effects of movements on parties.

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<sup>3</sup> Note the sharp contrast between these attributes and the assumptions made for instrumentalist mechanisms. These mechanisms are based on a set of key assumptions: (1) voters have multiple identities to choose from; (2) identities are fluid; and (3) voters seek material benefits in return for their participation.

Movements of marginalized groups perform two roles: They generate voice effects. They organize the group, announce its agency, and articulate its demand for social inclusion. They also generate facilitative effects (McAdam1982). By mobilizing a marginalized group, movements change the balance of power in the favor of a marginalized group. In a democracy they gradually make it more difficult for the state and other groups to repress their mobilization. This encourages future protest. Both these effects alter the electoral mobilization of a group.

At the moment of electoral opportunity, we should expect ethnic parties to succeed where ethnic movements have been strong. Similarly, we should expect the absence of ethnic movements to correspond with ethnic party failure. Yet, the observed variation in Dalit party performance runs counter to this expectation.

### ***Parties, Historical Movements, and Prior Coordination of the Ethnic Vote***

Theories on social cleavage (Lipset & Rokkan 1967) argue that political cleavages correspond with social cleavages. Other theories (Boix 1997; Kalyvas 1996; Chhibber 1999) emphasize the role of agency in the conversion of social cleavages into political cleavages. In the Indian context, recent contributions by Chhibber (1999) and Chandra (2004) argue that parties hold agency because they convert social cleavages into political cleavages. While building upon some of the insights of this literature, this work departs from it in two significant respects. First, it treats ethnic party mobilization and preferences of the ethnic voter at a given point in time as endogenous to the historical process of mobilization of the ethnic group. Second, it explores how the marginalization of an ethnic group impacts the process of its mobilization.

These explanations assume that parties are equally interested in mobilizing all the groups in a hierarchical society irrespective of the groups' social standing and that they mobilize marginalized groups on issues salient to those groups. But, neither the mobilization of a marginalized group nor the issue on which it is mobilized by a party is a foregone conclusion. It is important to specify the conditions under which parties mobilize marginalized groups in a hierarchical society. This aspect is especially pertinent because the mere possession of franchise does not guarantee that a party will mobilize a marginalized group on the issue of ethnic inclusion. For instance, marginalized groups are sometimes under the control of dominant groups; in such cases, parties can obtain the electoral support of subordinate groups through the members of the dominant groups who function as intermediaries – as a result, the marginalized group is not directly mobilized. Even if the marginalized group is able to vote independently without the direction of dominant groups, it may lack the capacity to mobilize itself. In this instance, parties will begin to mobilize the group, however, they will continue to determine the issues on which the marginalized group is mobilized – a case of undermobilization. Unless a marginalized ethnic group self-mobilizes, parties seeking its support will undermobilize it. This is the third proposition essential to my argument: for marginalized groups, group-mobilization creates incentives for political parties seeking the group's support to mobilize it in response to its exclusion-related grievances.

Movements lower the identity-related stigma of a marginalized group, allowing multiethnic parties to make cross-group appeals. Moreover, the marginalized group is

able to access alternate political identities. This lowers ethnic solidarity among ethnic voters.

Given the persistence of the norms of hierarchy in the absence of a movement, a multiethnic party will mobilize the group separately in addition to undermobilizing it. Moreover, the marginalized will not be able to access alternate political identities – they will remain confined to the stigmatized identity. This separate and unequal mobilization will sustain high ethnic solidarity. This is the fourth and final proposition: prior movements enable inclusive multiethnic mobilization and open alternate political identities for a marginalized group. These reduce ethnic solidarity among marginalized voters.

### *Argument*

The following explanation for the performance of an ethnic party representing a marginalized ethnic group brings together all four propositions presented above. To recap, they are:

- (1) Recognition (implying restoration of dignity to the collective identity and the removal of disadvantages accruing from the stigma) is a matter of high salience for members of historically marginalized groups.
- (2) The mobilization of a group can take two forms: It can take the form of an ethnic social or ethnic movement or it can take a form of a party. While a movement can succeed when opportunities allow the group to overcome external and internal constraints against mobilization, without the additional electoral opportunity, an ethnic party is unable to succeed.

- (3) Most important, unless a marginalized ethnic group self-mobilizes, parties seeking its support will under-mobilize it. Only when a group mobilizes itself will the party mobilize on the issues salient to it.
- (4) Cross-group mobilization and access to multiple political identities lowers ethnic solidarity among marginalized voters.

During the period of electoral opportunity, how well an ethnic party of the marginalized group performs depends on: (1) The level of ethnic solidarity among ethnic voters, and (2) on how salient the appeal of the ethnic party (based on recognition of the group) is to the marginalized voter during the process of choosing a party. The historical sequencing of the two forms of mobilization – with movements preceding ethnic parties – curtails the electoral prospects of an ethnic party at the moment of electoral opportunity. A movement gives voice to a historically marginalized group. It articulates the group's grievances and organizes the group's members. It affects how political parties mobilize the group.

In response to movements, multiethnic parties seeking the support of the marginalized group are compelled to acknowledge the group's exclusion-related grievances. They support the movement's activities and goals. They incorporate activists and symbols in their electoral campaigns and adopt the demand of rejecting social hierarchy. When multiethnic parties use these strategies, marginalized voters gain the recognition they seek in the electoral arena. This reduces the salience of the appeals made by the ethnic party by the time the party begins to compete during the period of party system fragmentation. Social recognition also gives members of the marginalized

group access to multiple political identities thereby lowering ethnic solidarity. By contrast, historically, where a marginalized group is constrained from self-mobilizing, a multiethnic party has no incentive to acknowledge the identity-related grievance of the group. Moreover, electoral mobilization neglects the issue of social exclusion.

Undermobilization of the group means that the issue of ethnic exclusion remains potentially salient in electoral politics. When the ethnic party begins to compete, its appeal possesses high salience. The party emerges as the focal point of the aspirations of the ethnic group. Prospects for its electoral performance are further boosted by regular electoral mobilization of the group as a separate excluded group, which sustains high levels of ethnic solidarity. By demonstrating how movements affect political parties, my argument adds to the recent work examining the relationship between political parties and movements (Goldstone 2003; Van Cott 2005) that has emphasized the linkages between the two forms of collective action.

Conventional wisdom on democratic politics often assumes the level of efficacy of citizenship to be equal across a polity. This, however, may not always be true in ethnically-fragmented, hierarchical (also known as ranked) ethnic systems (Horowitz 1985). In such systems, the efficacy levels of citizenship may vary across different ethnic groups because of discriminatory social institutions.<sup>4</sup> For example, individuals belonging to groups ranked low in the social order may not be able to access all their constitutional freedoms and guarantees. Additionally, these individuals may be denied access to public goods and services.

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<sup>4</sup> As described by Horowitz, an ideal type of ranked system has an acknowledged absence of an upper class belonging to the subordinate group, a ritualized mode of hierarchy and a leadership of the subordinates which necessarily has to enjoy the approval of the dominant groups.

T. H. Marshall (1964) introduced a tripartite model of citizenship, comprised of legal citizenship, political citizenship, and social citizenship. Each of these categories comes with a set of rights and privileges. Legal citizenship, for example, is the totality of rights that citizens have in matters involving the law, including mainly those rights connected with personal status. Political citizenship includes political rights, such as the right to vote in elections and the right to run for political office. Social citizenship includes citizens' rights to social benefits, such as health services, education, employment, and social security. According to Marshall's account, these types of citizenship evolved in Europe over the last three centuries. The demand for legal citizenship in Europe occurred in the eighteenth century. This was followed by the demand for political citizenship in the nineteenth century and the demand for social citizenship in the twentieth. It was believed that without social citizenship the relatively deprived members of society (such as the poor) lacked the ability to enjoy their legal and political citizenship fully, resulting in a rights gap.<sup>5</sup> Margalit (2002) has added a fourth dimension to Marshall's framework: symbolic citizenship. This aspect of citizenship allows members of a polity to share in the symbolic wealth of their society. It involves both the recognition of the symbols of all the groups and the avoidance of symbols which actively humiliate or reject some members of a polity.<sup>6</sup>

With the introduction of constitutional rights and democratic suffrage to ranked societies, the differential between possessing a right and the actual enjoyment of that right comes to drive politics. In India, the constitution grants equal legal and political

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<sup>5</sup> Taking a similar income-based view of rights, Marx blames the rights gap on class.

<sup>6</sup> Unlike Marshall, whose primary focus was class-related deprivations, Walzer (1993) and Young have highlighted group related concerns about the denial of social citizenship, focusing on the effects of social exclusion and an absence from the public sphere.

citizenship to all the members of the polity. With the passage of time, the struggle over symbolic and social citizenship has become viable and defined political contests.

Democratic theory suggests that in multiethnic societies, members of subordinate groups who are less likely to be rights-availing citizens should become attractive to political actors once armed with a vote, leading to the electoral mobilization of these groups on the issue of their social rights (Dahl 2006). In such a democratic setup, political parties are expected to emerge as vehicles for organizing, articulating, and representing the interests and aspirations of disadvantaged groups where watchdog institutions are unable to. And, indeed, in recent times political parties in India *have* mobilized marginalized citizens. However, in some cases, the marginalized have preferred multiethnic parties to make a claim on their behalf while in others they have preferred ethnic parties. Why this occurs is the riddle at the heart of this project.

There are three reasons why India is a useful site to study ethnic mobilization. First, possessing common electoral rules, a common set of social cleavages, and similar party systems, India's federal form of governance generates many cases for comparative study. Such control variables offer a unique opportunity for scholars of comparative politics to explain divergent patterns and outcomes across the different realms of politics.<sup>7</sup> Subnational analysis becomes viable because the federal system grants many powers to states in India, thus making state politics a contentious terrain. The increasing local distinctness of state politics and the autonomy the state governments enjoy over

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<sup>7</sup> This opportunity to conduct controlled comparisons has led some scholars to dub India as a laboratory of democracy (see Introduction in Jenkins, Rob, ed. *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics across India's States*). In recent times, scholars including Kohli(1987), Jenkins(1999), Varshney (2002), Chandra (2004), Sinha (2005) and Mitra (2006) have all made use of controlled comparisons.

policies lends further support to the enterprise of cross-state comparisons in India.

Second, India is more instructive than many other countries for the newly democratized states because, unlike the advanced industrial democracies, suffrage in India did not evolve in phases; instead, universal adult suffrage came with independence in 1947, resulting in the coexistence of political equality with social inequality. The constitutional document granted civic, political, and social rights at once. The realization of these rights, however, leaves much to be desired. Since social rights were not acquired through protracted struggles (Skocpol 1995; Tilly 2003), but in a moment of constitutional enlightenment, the institutionalization of these rights was weak. As a consequence, many citizens are left with the incomplete end of the social contract, comprised of unfulfilled commitments from the state.

Third, the nationwide weakening of the Congress Party over the past fifteen years and the appearance of coalition politics in its aftermath have created a window of opportunity for small parties—including ethnic parties—to be competitive. The variation in the performance of these parties has produced a variety of cases to compare across time and space.

### ***The Historical Background***

While presenting the draft of the constitution to the Indian nation in 1949, B. R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, warned:

On 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and

economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of democracy which this Constituent Assembly has so laboriously built up.

Socio-economic inequality continues to be a feature of the polity in India, yet the democratic structure has not collapsed as Ambedkar warned. However, his ominous prophecy has come true for the Congress Party, the organization around which most of independent India's democratic history has centered. Though once referred to as the 'Congress Party System,' (Kothari 1964), India's party system has experienced rapid party proliferation since the 1980s. Previously under-mobilized groups have been mobilized (Varshney 2000). Although this process is ongoing and its consequences remain uncertain, due to its historic nature, scholarly literature is already terming this phase a "democratic revolution" (Jaffrelot 2002; Pai 2001). This new democratic upsurge (Yadav 1996) has been marked by the appearance of political parties representing marginalized ethnic groups and ethnic parties campaigning on the issues of dignity and social justice. As already noted, attempts by ethnic parties to electorally mobilize historically marginalized ethnic groups have been successful only in some cases, but not in others.

### *Dalits*

The Hindu social order is made up of a continuous hierarchy of caste groups. As Table 1.1 shows, the Dalits, comprised of about 400 subcastes, are situated at the bottom of this hierarchy and were once regarded as untouchables by those above them in the social order. As a result of the historic nature of their discrimination, Dalits' economic status has come to mirror their social status. Across all of India, the indicators

for basic needs, including literacy, life expectancy, and access to electricity and drinking water are lower for Dalits than for the general population. Table 1.2 provides a comparison between the access Dalits and other groups have to these basic needs. Overall, Dalits make up 28 percent of the Indian poor and 37 percent of Dalits live below the starvation line (Sundaram & Tendulkar 2003).

**Table 1.1 The Hindu Caste System**

<b>Caste Name</b>	<b>Traditional Occupations</b>
Brahmins	priests, scholars
Kshatriyas	nobles, warriors
Vaishyas	merchants, traders
Shudras (Other Backward Castes (OBCs))	laborers, peasants
Untouchables (Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Dalits)	polluting occupations: barbers, leatherworkers, scavengers, sweepers, toilet cleaners

**Table 1.2 Basic Needs Indicators (Percentages)**

	<b>Dalits</b>	<b>Total Population</b>
<b>Drinking Water</b>	73.6	76.3
<b>Literacy</b>	54.69	68.81
<b>Sanitation</b>	23.32	40.64
<b>Electricity</b>	45.65	66.34

Source: Census of India, Government of India 2001

Today, the conventional wisdom on nationalism and ethnicity says that all identities are constructed (Laitin 1998; Smith 2003; Posner 2005; Varshney 2006). In India, the British colonial state took the first steps towards the fixing of caste categories. The colonial government recognized the caste system through practices like the enumeration of castes in the census. Begun in the late nineteenth century, these practices collapsed the various subcastes of untouchables into a single category first

referred to as the depressed classes and, later in 1935, as the “scheduled castes.” This bureaucratic nomenclature survives to date.<sup>8</sup>

When the demand for self-governance was made in the 1920s, the issue of separate representation for Hindus and Muslims came to the fore. A petition made to the colonial government argued that untouchables could not be considered a part of the Hindu community. B.R. Ambedkar and other untouchable leaders formally demanded separate electorates for their community. It was suggested that these separate electorates would allow for the election of untouchable candidates in voting districts where only untouchable voters could vote. It was argued that such a policy would make Dalit candidates accountable only to the Dalit community rather than to other, more powerful communities.

Seeing the untouchables as a part of the Hindu community, Gandhi opposed this proposal. After the British colonial government of India announced its intention to grant separate electorates to the untouchables, Gandhi went on a fast-unto-death and forced the withdrawal of this proposal. Left with no choice but to withdraw his demand, Ambedkar signed the Poona Pact of 1932 that provided for reserved constituencies for Dalits. These reserved constituencies were the equivalents of voting districts wherein only untouchable or Dalit candidates could be elected. Under this system, even non-Dalit voters had to vote for Dalit candidates to ensure a Dalit presence in the legislature.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> It refers to a list of untouchable castes that was prepared by the British government in 1935 and attached to the Order-in-Council issued under the Government of India Act of 1935.

<sup>9</sup> Today, Indian history textbooks rarely mention his capitulation under pressure. However, Dalits see the pact that killed their demand for separate electorates as a great betrayal.

Eventually, the Indian constitution abolished untouchability, enshrined a number of articles guaranteeing Dalits protection from discrimination, provided for affirmative action policies promoting Dalits' upward mobility, and established institutions to monitor Dalits' welfare. Another set of policies guaranteed that certain electoral districts at the national, state, and local (municipal and village) levels were reserved for Dalit candidates.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the national legislature, various state legislatures promulgated laws to facilitate the reporting and punishing of atrocities against Dalits.

Dalits remain poorly represented in public life outside the political arena.<sup>11</sup> The enactment of laws to protect Dalits from violence and atrocities has been consistently weak.<sup>12</sup> Historically, the underrepresentation of Dalits across both public and private institutions<sup>13</sup> and their social exclusion has meant that, in many parts of India, Dalits have had restricted access to the state. In these parts of the country, Dalits have only nominal citizenship and the rights and freedoms guaranteed to them have remained beyond the vast majority's reach. Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1999) observe that "there is indeed something of a 'hard bar' separating Untouchables from the rest of Indian society, and Untouchables themselves have come to see that bar as the basis for a certain amount of common consciousness and action."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In electoral districts where the percentage of Dalits is high, the district is reserved for a Dalit candidate. In his systematic study of reserved Parliamentary districts, Alistair McMillan (2005) shows that having a Dalit representative has not improved the economic status of Dalits in these reserved districts.

<sup>11</sup> Only 1.2% of Dalits in rural areas and 4.7% of Dalits in urban areas possess college education. For the upper castes, 5.2% in rural areas and 25.3% in urban areas possess college education.

<sup>12</sup> The reports of the watchdog institutions created to monitor Dalit welfare are almost never tabled on time in the parliament.

<sup>13</sup> A recent survey of 315 key decision makers in newspapers and TV channels in Delhi did not include a single Dalit.

<sup>14</sup> In many ways, Dalits face the same constraints against upward mobility as do other poor citizens, but the added disadvantage of social exclusion for poor Dalits makes their escape from poverty that much harder.

The above account highlights the void that remained in the construction of the identity of untouchables. While rest of the society contributed to untouchable identity through exclusion, through its administrative processes, the state turned the untouchables into an ethnic group by counting and categorizing them. The untouchables thus became an insufficiently imagined community (Anderson 1985).<sup>15</sup> This insufficiency was on the count of untouchables lacking agency in the construction of their identity. Democratic politics, broadly defined, opens the space for self-definition of the marginalized.

It should come as no surprise then that wherever Dalits were able to mobilize, the reason for self-mobilization among the untouchables was the restoration of dignity to their identity. Historically, the claim for inclusion and the rejection of the principles of social hierarchy occurred in different parts of India at different points in time as well as both inside and outside the electoral arena. This dissertation will show that although the goal of mobilization among Dalits is the same, the timing of mobilization and the form of mobilization is consequential for the electoral prospects of an ethnic party at the point of party system fragmentation. But why the difference in the timing of the appearance of movements?

### ***Why Historical Movements in some states, but not in others?***

A variety of factors enabled the early appearance of emancipatory movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Unlike Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, both are coastal states and were exposed to Christian missionary activity in the nineteenth century. In these states,

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson grants agency to members of a group in the process of imagining themselves as a national community.

opportunities for upward mobility were also generated by the colonial government that employed untouchables in the army and the industrial sector, where Dalits provided cheap labor. This began to create a small class of untouchables who were not under the direct control of dominant castes. In search of converts, the Christian missionaries educated members of the intermediate castes and untouchables. Under the influence of missionaries, the lower orders began to question the basis of the power and control exercised by the upper castes. This eventually resulted in the appearance of movements that challenged the principle of hierarchy and ultimately its rejection. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar such opportunities for the creation of a mobilizing elite were few and far between. Even when such opportunities did exist giving rise to a fledgling movement—as was the case in urban Uttar Pradesh—they remained confined to those areas.

However, a small educated elite and exposure to ideas of emancipation only explain the rise of movements. Their influence on the political process depended primarily on their spread to the rural hinterland where a large majority of untouchables reside. The British colonial government implemented different land tenure systems for extracting revenue across different regions in India. While much of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu came under the cultivator-based land revenue collection system (ryotwari) during colonial rule, substantial parts of Uttar Pradesh and all of Bihar were under the landlord-based revenue collection system (zamindari) (See Table 1.3). As landless peasants and marginal farmers, Dalits were at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder in both systems. Still, the two systems presented differing levels of external as well as internal constraints and opportunities for subordinate groups to mobilize.

**Table 1.3 Statewise distribution of non-landlord districts**

<b>States</b>	<b>Mean non-landlord Proportion</b>
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	0.42
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	0.75
<i>Bihar</i>	0.00
<i>Maharashtra</i>	0.78

Source: Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee and, Abhijit V. Banerjee and Lakshmi Iyer, , "History, Institutions and Economic Performance: The Legacy of Colonial Land Tenure Systems in India" (June 2002).

On the one hand, in regions where the colonial state collected revenue directly from a cultivators, the agrarian structure allowed subordinate groups like Dalits to be relatively free of the control exercised by the landowning caste groups. On the other hand, in regions where landlords were granted control over revenue collection, the structural control over Dalits was far stronger. Even though these systems were discontinued at the end of colonial rule, their legacies persist and impact patterns of democratic mobilization. In regions of weak structural domination, movements demanding social equality were able to penetrate rural areas. In areas of strong structural domination, recognition demanding movements either did not arise, or if they did, they were not able to spread their influence into rural areas.

### ***Institutional Context***

Since the caste system is common throughout India, each broad caste category exists across the country. Moreover, no one caste enjoys a majority in an electoral district. As a result, ethnic parties often have to seek support from other ethnic groups to stitch together a winning coalition at the level of the electoral district. Consequently, ethnic parties often look to put up candidates from other ethnic groups to acquire those

ethnicities' votes. These votes may be small in number, yet they matter in close races. As Table 1.3 shows, Dalits are spread across all the major Indian states. Moreover, within the states, the Dalit population is dispersed over different electoral districts. Across states, Dalits are divided linguistically. Within states, Dalits are divided by differences of subcastes. Nevertheless, successful Dalit parties have been able to mobilize Dalits across subcaste differences within a state. Next, I will briefly sketch the institutional context for an ethnic party in India to succeed and capture power. To be successful under the single member district plurality electoral system, an ethnic party must mobilize a large section of the ethnic group not only in an electoral district, but also, across the entire state. The larger the vote share from within the ethnic group in an election, the more likely the ethnic party is to attract strong candidates belonging to other ethnic groups in subsequent elections. A strong candidate is one with name recognition and a sizable personal following within the electoral district.

**Table 1.4 Dalit Populations Across Indian States**

<b>States and Union Territories</b>	<b>Dalit Percentage of Population</b>
Andhra Pradesh	16.2
Assam	6.9
Bihar	15.7
Chhattisgarh	11.6
Delhi	16.9
Gujarat	7.1
Haryana	19.3
Himachal Pradesh	24.7
Jammu & Kashmir	7.6
Jharkhand	11.8
Karnataka	16.2
Kerala	9.8
Madhya Pradesh	15.2
Maharashtra	13.1
Orissa	16.5
Pondicherry	16.2
Punjab	28.9
Rajasthan	17.2
Sikkim	5
Tamil Nadu	19.8
Tripura	17.4
Uttar Pradesh	21.1
Uttranchal	17.9
West Bengal	23

Source: Census of India, Primary Census Abstract, 2001. Note the table does not include those states – Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland – where the population of Dalits is less than 3% overall.

When an ethnic party enters into such patchwork ethnic coalitions and is able to grab a substantial vote share, it can go on to enter into coalition arrangements with other parties in the next round of elections. Here, once again, a party's perceived electoral strength determines the number of districts it gets to compete in as a part of the coalition arrangement. Finally, if the party is a member of a winning coalition, its share of legislators affects its bargaining for cabinet position within the coalition government. Hence, for an ethnic party, a large vote share can produce multiplier effects. The point of this discussion is to emphasize that, in a fragmenting party system, the first and most important objective for an ethnic party is to amass the largest possible vote share from

within the ethnic group – ethnic vote consolidation matters. Now even when there is a clear reason for an ethnic group to mobilize, its electoral mobilization depends on a favorable opportunity structure.

### *Opportunity Structure*

Certain prerequisites in the institutional opportunity structure at both the micro and macro levels enable electoral mobilization of members of historically marginalized groups. First and foremost, a member of a marginalized group must possess franchise and be able to vote freely. In this sense, it is not enough merely to hold the legal entitlement to vote. The voter must also enjoy the freedom to exercise franchise. A marginalized voter can be obstructed from exercising the right on the basis of new laws, as was the case in the Jim Crow South. In other instances, coercion can be used to intimidate the voter, a past practice in some Indian states.

Although invested with the right to vote, Dalits were prevented from voting independently in the first few decades after India's independence. In certain states, they either voted under coercive instruction from the landlords they worked for or were prevented from casting their ballots. Gradual changes in the social structure and institutional intervention by the state have altered this situation. The relations between land owners and laborers have undergone a qualitative shift, with feudal relations gradually being replaced by contractual ones. This change has been brought about by a variety of factors, including land ownership ceiling laws, fragmentation of landholdings, increased mechanization, and diversification of the rural economy (Gupta

2005). These changes have broken the control that the landowning castes previously exercised over the Dalits (Frankel and Rao 1990).

Additionally, the state in India has taken steps to remove the threat of intimidation during the election process. The security arrangements for elections have become unprecedented. In states known for electoral violence or fraud, elections are staggered over many days to allow for movement of security forces between different areas. Complaints of electoral malpractice are taken seriously and widely reported in the mass media.

Another prerequisite for successful electoral mobilization is that, at the macro-level, the party system must allow for small parties to become competitive. This is more easily achieved in a Proportional Representation (PR) system, where seats are allotted based on vote shares, than in a Single Member District Plurality (SMDP) system, where the winner takes all and competition is typically between only two parties. In the latter instance, the party system must have undergone fragmentation to allow for a small party (which emerging parties typically are) to be successful. We know that in a first-past-the-post (FPP) winner take all system, parties that consistently miss out on becoming a part of the government face the danger of becoming irrelevant. Remaining out of power denies these parties access to state resources and influence over public policy. Consequently, their supporters (meaning the elites involved in the party organization) of such parties often defect to other parties (Duverger 1964). Party proliferation and a larger number of what Sartori (1976) calls “relevant parties” can change this outcome. Party proliferation results in the emergence of alliance politics. Participation in coalition politics then allows smaller parties to become significant actors at the state and

national level. This enhances the incentives for political entrepreneurs to mobilize the electorate and further induces party proliferation.

### *The Fragmenting Party System*

An illustration of this process is provided by the Indian experience where the number of national parties has shrunk from 14 in 1951 to 6 in 2006. At the same time, the number of state-based parties registered with the Election Commission in India has grown from 35 in 1951 to 781 in 2006.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1.5 Party Proliferation in India**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of National Parties</b>	<b>Number of State Parties</b>
1951	14	25
2006	6	781

Source: Election Commission of India, Statistical Reports of Lok Sabha and State Assembly Elections, 1951, 2006.

In the first twenty years of its democratic life, India came to be viewed as a state dominated by a single party. The Congress party remained India's most electorally successful party at both the state and national levels. Its stature as the face of the freedom movement, its relatively well-developed organizational structure, and the preeminence of its leadership resulted in the dominance of the party. During an initial twenty-year phase, the Congress party's control over national and state governments was not strongly challenged. The party actively utilized the strategy of co-opting

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<sup>16</sup> The logic of federalism implies that coalition governance at the national and state level creates more opportunities for small parties to receive access to public resources. For example, parties may be relevant at the state or national level, and sometimes at both.

different movements.<sup>17</sup>

By 1967, the aforementioned factors began to fade away and for the first time the Congress Party lost elections to opposition parties across many states. In the following decades, the party suffered two significant setbacks in the form of assassinations of its leadership, first Indira Gandhi in 1984 and then Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The early nineties marked the unraveling of the Congress Party System. In the wake of the decline of the Congress Party, other national- and state-based parties made electoral gains. In 1952, the Congress Party's vote share in the national election stood at 45 percent whereas state-based parties received 8.2 percent. By 2004, the vote share of the Congress Party shrank to 26.53 percent while that of state-based parties expanded to 28.9 percent. With the fragmentation of the electoral mandate, coalition parties became the order of the day at both the national level and in the states. Consider the following: since 1989 all 7 national governments have been coalition governments and the number of states being ruled by coalition governments has increased from 0 in 1952 to 4 in 1995 to 18 in 2006. (There are currently 29 Indian states.) In the states where Congress party rule was replaced by a regional party system earlier, such a party system has also fragmented in recent times.

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<sup>17</sup> These included ethnic, religious, and class-based interests. The Congress Party was the quintessential catchall party which, in trying to represent all aspirations, wanted to mean the most things to the most people.

**Table 1.6 The Erosion of the Congress Party Vote Share in Lok Sabha (Parliamentary) Elections**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Congress Party vote share</b>	<b>National parties vote share overall</b>	<b>State parties vote share overall</b>
1951	44.99	76	8.1
1971	43.68	77.84	10.17
1984	49.1	79.8	11.56
2004	26.53	62.89	28.9

Source: Election Commission of India, Statistical Reports of Lok Sabha and State Assembly Elections, 1951, 1971, 1984, and 2004.

**Table 1.7 States with Coalition Governments**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1951	0
1995	4
2006	18

Source: Election Commission of India.

### ***So What Explains Party Proliferation?***

Scholars have furnished two explanations for the sharp increase in the number of political parties in India. Chhibber and Kollman (2004) argue that the powers granted to the state in the Indian federal system resulted in both higher levels of party competition over resources at the sub-national or state level and the appearance of new regional parties. Chandra (2004) has proposed that the lack of internal democracy in the political parties of India blocks the progress of ambitious politicians, resulting in their exit from the political party. These politicians then either join other political parties or form their own political parties.

Extending the logic of this explanation, it can be argued that in addition to being susceptible to factional breakup, leader-centric parties are also confronted with the successor problem. These are centralized parties, and the party leadership is the focal point for the coordination of voter support. Over time, the identity of the party is so substantially dependent on the leadership that the leader almost turns indispensable. As a result, the changing of the guard brought about by the death or retirement of a leader

can produce a sudden loss of support for the party and open space for a new political party. Party creation does not, however, necessarily guarantee party success. In recent times, favorable conditions for smaller parties (as described above) have meant that, among political entrepreneurs, first-time entrants and old timers leaving parties feel more emboldened to form their own political parties. Furthermore, the decentralization of power is common to all the states and the majority of both old and new parties lack internal democracy. Despite these features, ethnic parties have succeeded only in some states.

This phase of party proliferation is defined by two noticeable trends. First, the Congress party did not decline uniformly across states, and other multiethnic state-based parties did not wither away overnight. For example, the Congress party has turned into a peripheral actor in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In states like Maharashtra, however, the Congress Party was weakened, but did not become electorally irrelevant. Second, even though the caste system is common to Indian society, not all the newly successful parties were caste-based. In the Northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, an overwhelming number of new parties were caste-based. In southern states such as Tamil Nadu and in the western state of Maharashtra, however, the parties were largely multiethnic parties. In a multiethnic democracy, the existence of an ethnic group does not necessarily generate an ethnic party or the success of that party. Why ethnic parties succeed in some cases while not in others remains an important question to answer. The fragmenting party system and its accompanying effect of coalition governance provide an excellent opportunity for visiting this question.

### *Methodology, Design, and Case Selection*

I adopt what has come to be described as a mechanism-process approach. According to Tilly (2000), mechanism- and process-based accounts explain salient features of episodes or significant differences among them by identifying robust mechanisms of relatively general scope within those episodes. Similarly, a group of scholars (Elster 1989, 1999; Coleman 1990; Stinchcombe 1991; Bunge 1997; Hedström & Swedberg 1998) search for recurrent concatenations of mechanisms into more complex processes. Brady (2003) writes, “In this approach, causation can be thought of as a process involving the mechanisms and capacities that lead from a cause to an effect.” Mechanisms are thus observable ingredients of a theory and usually operate at an analytical level lower than the theory. By making the explanations more fine-grained, mechanisms add to the credibility of a theory (Johnson 2000).

In keeping with this approach, the goal of this project is to unearth the process and its comprising mechanisms that define the mobilization of a marginalized group by ethnic movements and political parties. It does not propose a covering law, but rather restricts itself to selective explanation of salient features by means of partial causal analogies. While building a theory, my objective is to establish that the mechanisms are plausible and can be empirically confirmed. As I will demonstrate, only under broadly similar initial conditions and given other enabling mechanisms will outcomes be similar, otherwise the outcomes will vary.<sup>18</sup> I use both within-case process-tracing and controlled cross-case comparisons. These two instruments help me identify mechanisms and establish their validity (George & Bennett 2005).

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<sup>18</sup> For a clear articulation of the difference between covering law, propensity, mechanism and process, and system approaches, see Tilly (2000).

Broadly speaking, I develop a context-driven explanation: I view ethnic party success in a particular state at a particular juncture as a product of the broader social and political context of that state. For this reason, I pay close attention to the process that define this context. In order to understand these temporal constructs (which is what processes are), I turn to the technique of process-tracing within a case. I deploy it in conjunction with the technique of controlled cross-comparison, which involves the manipulation of a cause in a controlled setting. Since all cases are drawn from India, a common set of features allow me to deploy controlled cross-case comparisons with a greater degree of confidence.

I selected the states of Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Maharashtra for this comparative study for the following reasons:

As discussed earlier, two of these states, namely Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra are home to historical movements opposing the principle of caste hierarchy and social equality. While in the other two states such movements were either absent or weak. In Bihar such a movement did not appear, while in Uttar Pradesh it was weak and confined to a few urban centers. The four cases allowed me to compare Dalit party performance across movement states and non-movement states. As such, all four states have possessed a favorable electoral environment for ethnic parties to be successful. They have experienced party proliferation and have coalition governments. Across each state, Dalit-based parties compete in elections, yet their performances diverge. In my work, I juxtapose the electoral experience of the Dalit-based parties in movement and non movement states - comparing the Dalit parties in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra and Bihar. This comparison allows me to identify and enumerate the

distinctions in the mechanisms across the two pairs, both of which explore similar variation in the performance of ethnic parties. While the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Dalit-based party in Uttar Pradesh, has improved its electoral performance over time and expanded its vote share in every election since 1989, garnering eighty percent of the Dalit vote in the assembly election in 2007, the Dalit Panthers of India in Tamil Nadu have been unable to expand their vote share among the Dalits, with their vote share not touching even five percent. This is somewhat surprising as Tamil Nadu, the center of an anti-caste movement, has a longer history of Dalit social mobilization than Uttar Pradesh. Today, Tamil Nadu has close to eighty organizations working on Dalit rights, yet the Dalit party there is unable to perform well.

A local Dalit-based party in Bihar, the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), has contested only a few parliamentary and assembly elections, yet it has performed reasonably well. The BSP also competes in Bihar, but its strength is regionally concentrated in the southern part of the state. Together, the BSP and LJP captured 40 percent of the Dalit vote in Bihar during the last state assembly election. As in Uttar Pradesh, the Dalits of Bihar have remained largely untouched by a historical movement demanding higher social equality. By contrast, in Maharashtra, the historical fountainhead of the Dalit movement, Dalit parties have been unable to take advantage of the fragmenting party system. The weak electoral results of the BSP reflect this paradox. It was unable to capture more than 20 percent of the Dalit vote in Maharashtra.

There is yet another reason for selecting these states. These are all large and politically important states, meaning that parties with significant electoral support in them are not only likely to impact the local politics, but also to play an important role at

the national level.

**Table 1.8 Dalit Party Performance in State Assembly Elections**

States (Year)	Dalit Party	Vote Share of the total votes	Seats Won
Uttar Pradesh (2007)	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	30.43%	206 out of 403
Tamil Nadu (2006)	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katch(VCK)/DPI(Dalit Panthers)	1.29%	4 out of 234
Bihar (2005)	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) Lok Jan Shakti Party(LJP)	4.17% 11.10%	4 out of 243 10 out of 243
Maharashtra (2004)	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	4%	0 out 288

Source: Election Commission of India, 2002- 2006.

**Table 1.9 Dalit Party Performance in 2004 Parliamentary Elections**

States	Parties	Vote Share of the total votes	Seats Won
Uttar Pradesh	Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	24.67%	19 out of 80
Tamil Nadu	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	0.58%	0 out of 39
Bihar	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) Lok Jan Shakti Party(LJP)	3.58% 8.19%	0 4 out of 40
Maharashtra	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	3.05%	0 out of 48

Source: Election Commission of India, 2004.

**Table 1.10 Dalit Party Performance within the Dalit Community during State Assembly Elections**

States(Year)	Dalit Party	Vote Share among Dalits
Uttar Pradesh(2002)	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	55%
Tamil Nadu(2006)	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katch(VCK)/DPI(Dalit Panthers)	4%
Bihar(2005)	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) & Lok Jan Shakti Party(LJP)	40%
Maharashtra(2004)	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	20%

Source: CSDS State Assembly Election Surveys (2002-2006)

**Table 1.11 Dalit Party Performance within the Dalit Community during Parliamentary Elections**

<i>States</i>	<i>Dalit Party</i>	<i>Vote Share among Dalits</i>
Uttar Pradesh	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	68%
Tamil Nadu	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katch(VCK)/DPI(Dalit Panthers)	0%
Bihar	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) & Lok Jan Shakti Party(LJP)	15.1%
Maharashtra	Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)	11%

*Source: CSDS National Election Survey (2004)*

### ***Data***

I make use of information culled from secondary sources, documentary evidence gathered from government departments, and survey data gathered by the Census of India and the National Sample Survey Organization. However, my argument will primarily rely on two data sources: (1) The 2004 round of the Indian National Election Study—the only data source of its kind, possessing information on the political participation and beliefs of voters belonging to different social groups;<sup>19</sup> and (2) interview and focus group data collected during my fieldwork in two districts from each of four states: Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Bihar. I specifically chose districts with sizable Dalit population because Dalit parties were active in them. I interpret the survey data in the light of voter responses gathered during focus groups and interview discussions.

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<sup>19</sup> The electoral districts for these surveys were selected through random sampling based on probability proportionate to state and community size and polling booths. Similarly, the respondents were also selected through a stratified random sample using the voter lists. This is the first round of the NES with sufficient sample size to allow for comparison across states.

The fieldwork involved 20 focus groups in each state (80 total) with 1100 participants and 100 open-ended interviews with Dalit voters in each of the four states (400 total) and a survey of 40 large Dalit localities in each state with 300-plus Dalit households in them to check for political party presence. Finally, I conducted ethnographic work involving observing and interviewing petitioners at the district headquarters and at the offices of district presidents of different parties and members of the state legislative assembly and parliament in the fieldwork districts. My objective was to gather data on the caste and class background of those who showed up with petitions and the nature of these petitions. I was also interested in the quality of interaction between the petitioner and the party or government official. The focus groups confined interaction with the study participants to a moderated discussion around select questions. This generated the necessary information for the study. The focus-group method (as compared to a method like participant observation) also allowed me to replicate the questions across different areas and to test for the robustness of my findings (Morgan 1997). By observing a representative sample of the participants as they compared and shared their views regarding their support for parties, I was keen to contrast individual opinions with the participants' consensus view or sets of distinct opinions. I tabulated all the responses of the participants. In the following chapters, however, I only report modal responses to my questions. For an elaborate discussion on the focus groups see Appendix A. I conducted long open-ended interviews with voters in each site to supplement and cross-check information gathered through the focus groups.<sup>20</sup> My fieldwork lasted a total of fourteen months. During that time, I observed election campaigns for the 2004 parliamentary elections and assembly elections across

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<sup>20</sup> For a justification of the focus group methodology and its implementation, see Appendix 1.

three of the four states.<sup>21</sup> I also conducted interviews with party leaders and workers belonging to parties that seek support from Dalits. I also carried out a voter survey to assess party penetration in Dalit localities across the four states. The sample size for this survey was expanded by including an additional twenty localities in each of the four states.

### ***Dissertation Organization***

This dissertation is organized into five additional chapters and a conclusion. While a substantial part of the dissertation is focused on why Dalits support their ethnic parties in some states, but multiethnic parties in others, I begin in Chapter 2 by asking a prior question: Despite falling predominantly among the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) and being the worst-supplied consumers of state services, why do Dalits turn out to vote in similar numbers as members of other ethnic categories with higher SES? In Chapter 3, I review the theoretical explanations of ethnic party performance before presenting the framework of my argument in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 use paired comparative case studies to illustrate the theory, my explanation of the variation of ethnic party performance. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes by considering the implications of the argument for the provision of public goods.

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<sup>21</sup> I collected data through the following assembly elections: in Maharashtra in 2004, Bihar in 2005, and Tamil Nadu 2006.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What Motivates Dalits to Vote?**

Before delving into the process of how Dalits came to be mobilized by political parties, we must first establish the reasons why Dalits show up to vote. A well established theory in the literature on political participation is that members of a polity with lower socioeconomic status (SES) participate less than members with higher SES. However, this theory is not borne out by the Indian experience. Dalits fall among those with the lowest SES. They are socially excluded and relatively deprived as compared to the rest of Indian society. They are some of the worst supplied consumers of state services and an accountability gap exists between the majority of Dalits and the state. Consequently, one might expect participation of Dalits to be lower than participation of other members of the polity. Still, Dalits have not withdrawn from the democratic process. Instead, in terms of turnout, their participation during elections remains steadfast, as does their faith in democratic institutions. I argue that this faith and the higher than expected turnout of Dalits is driven by two relationships in which they find themselves: first, a relationship with the state and, second, a relationship with other ethnic groups situated above them in the social hierarchy. For Dalits, the act of voting represents an opportunity to affirm individual citizenship in the wake of state neglect

Moreover, voting represents a form of symbolic resistance against the Dalits' exclusion by other groups and the indignities that accompany it.

I begin this chapter with a discussion on the backdrop for voting in Indian elections. I follow with an overview of the voting pattern for Dalits and other ethnic categories. Next, I discuss the various explanations proposed by the literature on political participation to account for this pattern. I then move to the responses of focus group participants to illustrate the nature of marginalization experienced by the Dalits. Next, I shift the focus to the literature on citizenship and resistance in order to develop an alternative analytical framework for understanding the electoral participation of Dalits. In the final section, I interpret the act of voting within the contexts of marginalization that Dalits perceive; that is, both with respect to the state as citizens and with respect to other ethnic groups as a subordinate community.

Before moving further in the chapter, a few comments are in order. First, this chapter's focus will remain on Dalits who are poor. If going by the one-dollar-a-day definition of poverty, a large portion of untouchables is poor; if going by the two-dollar-a-day definition, a large majority is. India's minimal welfare system and its weak supply of public goods exacerbate poverty among Dalits. Second, it is important to clarify that this chapter does not furnish a predictive model for the turnout of Dalits. Rather, the sole aim of the chapter is to highlight the framework within which Dalits interpret the act of voting.

## *Voting in India*

Voting is the least expensive and by far the most egalitarian form of political participation. Citizens wishing to cast their ballots must line up along with everyone else, irrespective of either their ethnic or socioeconomic status. Over six decades, the Indian state has regularly conducted elections for the national parliament and state assemblies. An independent electoral commission has overseen these elections and election results have seldom been challenged. Incumbents have been regularly replaced,<sup>22</sup> making the turnover of elected representatives in India one of the highest among democratic countries.

The use of party symbols on the paper ballot in the past and, more recently, on electronic voting machines has ensured that a lack of literacy has not prevented voters from choosing parties. Another feature of the electoral process in India is that updating voter lists is the responsibility of the Election Commission. This absolves all citizens of self-registering for voting. In 1971, the exercise of counting of votes was moved from the polling booth to the district centers to increase the anonymity of the voter and the locality.

Most importantly, the state in India has tried to remove the threat of intimidation during the election process. In the first two decades of India's democracy, the landed elite exercised control over the turnout in rural areas (Rudolph & Rudolph 1967; Kohli, 1987; Dube 1999); these practices have almost disappeared. The state makes unprecedented security arrangements for elections. In regions known for electoral violence or fraud, elections are staggered over many days to allow for movement of security forces between different areas. The mass media takes complaints of electoral

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<sup>22</sup> Yadav (1999) found that between 1989 and 1999 two-thirds of the incumbents lost their elections.

malpractice seriously and widely reports them. If irregularities in an election are confirmed, the state countermands the election results and orders re-polling (Lyngdoh 2004). Not surprisingly, the Election Commission enjoys the highest credibility among all state institutions (Linz, Stepan, and Yadav 2007). With the possible exception of the elections in Jammu and Kashmir, especially in the seventies and eighties, and those in some Northeastern states,<sup>23</sup> elections in India are largely free and fair and a large majority of Indian voters see them as such (NES, 2004). The regularity and perceived fairness of the electoral process have provided the backdrop for the emergence of patterns of voting that appear paradoxical in light of the literature on participation.

### ***Patterns of Voting in India***

Contrary to SES-based explanations which propose a direct relationship between SES and political participation, studies have shown that in India, voters belonging to lower SES vote in the same numbers as those belonging to higher SES (Eldersveld and Ahmed, 1978; Yadav 1996, 2001; Alam 2004). These studies also indicate that a low variation in the relative turnout of different socioeconomic categories and ethnic groups is a regular feature of the electoral turnout in India despite the persistence of hierarchical relations among members of these categories. Table 2.1 provides the breakdown of the aggregate turnout along the SES and ethnic categories for parliamentary elections in 2004. The data support the finding that there is almost no variation in turnout across SES and ethnic categories. In general, the poor vote in the same numbers as those belonging to higher income groups. Dalits vote in slightly higher numbers than other ethnic categories across all income groups.

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<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that both these areas have been home to long-standing insurgency movements.

**Table 2.1: Caste Category and Class-wise Breakdown of Turnout in the 2004 National Election**

	Dalits (SCs)	Backward Caste (OBCs)	Upper Castes	Total Percentage
<i>Income\Caste</i>	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	
<i>Upper Income</i>	67.1	57.1	56.8	57.6
<i>Middle Income</i>	57.5	60.4	53.1	56.5
<i>Poor</i>	61.3	56.9	59	58.6
<i>Total Percentage</i>	60.3	57.8	55.7	

Source: NES 2004(Centre for the Study of Developing Societies). The electoral districts for these surveys were selected through random sampling based on probability proportionate to state and community size and polling booths. Similarly the respondents were also selected through a stratified random sample using the voter lists.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Why is the turnout of Dalits puzzling?***

The majority of Dalits belong to lower SES categories. Consequently, the large voter turnout among Dalits calls the long-presumed relationship between SES and participation into question. In the following section, I review the pattern of Dalit voting in the light of the SES-based explanation, a patronage-based explanation, and explanations that relate turnout to factors such as party organization, coercion, and bribery.

### ***Explaining Turnout***

Relying on the evidence of turnout in developed democracies, SES-based explanations of political participation have consistently claimed that characteristics including income, education, residential location, and gender of eligible voters determine who shows up to vote (Nie, Powell, & Prewitt, 1969). In its elemental form, this approach is known as the SES model. In this model, education, income, and

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<sup>24</sup>For NES 2004, 4082 Dalits, 6854 backward caste individuals, and 6145 upper caste individuals were surveyed. Dalits: 252 Upper Income, 1510 Middle Income and 2320.poor; Backward Castes: 917 Upper Income, 3492 Middle Income and 2445 poor; Upper Castes: 1956 Upper Income, 2568 Middle Income and 1621 poor.

occupation, either alone or in some combination, explain participation (Conway 1991; Milbrath and Goel 1977; Nagel 1987; Verba et. al. 1978).

To account for the patterns in participation in the case of America, the SES model points to Tocquevillian as well as Madisonian impulses (Campbell, 2006); in other words, mechanisms rooted in civic duty as well as interests. A variant of the SES model, the civic-volunteerism explanation, posits one set of mechanisms for participation, suggesting that resources for participation, engagement in politics, and processes for recruitment lead to higher political participation. Ordinary, non-political activity in these three spheres can lead to the development of skills that are politically relevant and, therefore, can facilitate political participation (Brady et al 1995). Another mechanism suggests that citizens develop a sense of civic duty in schools at the time of adolescence where they internalize norms of civic duty which remain with them through adulthood (Campbell 2006).

Studies on voting in the US find that ethnic groups including African Americans and Latinos vote in fewer numbers than whites. Some (Uhlener et al 1989; Verba et al 1993) suggest that poor distribution of resources across racial and ethnic groups explains racial and ethnic inequalities in political participation in the American case. These authors demonstrate that, if socioeconomic effects are controlled for, differences in participation rates across groups decrease substantially. That said, these mechanisms are unable to account for the patterns of participation in India. Since larger proportions of Dalits are poor than those belonging to the Other Backward Castes (OBC) and Upper Caste categories, the SES based explanations should predict lower turnout among them. Yet this is not true. The turnout among Dalits is slightly higher than those of other

categories. In the 2004 national election, the aggregate turnout percentage for Dalits was 60.3, for the Other Backward Castes it was 57.8, and for the Upper Castes it was 55.7. Furthermore, Dalits belonging to the lowest income strata vote in slightly higher numbers than the poor in other categories (See Table 2.1).

There are several other potential explanations for the higher than expected Dalit turnout. One explanation is that political parties may be mobilizing those belonging to lower SES to vote. After all, those living below two dollars a day form the majority of the voters in India. However, with perhaps the exception of the communist parties which have an active presence primarily in the two states of West Bengal and Kerala, party organizations in India are weak. It must also be emphasized that in India, the outreach of advocacy groups and intermediate organizations like unions, is limited among rural and urban Dalits. Only 15 percent Dalits report that they have membership in either a political party, civic, or caste association (NES, 2004).<sup>25</sup>

Another potential explanation for high Dalit turnout is that coercion significantly impacts the decision to vote among Dalits given their subordinate status. Indeed, in the not-so-distant past coercion did play a role in increasing and decreasing turnout in some parts of India. Today, however, national elections are held by and large without coercion. Data from the National Election Study suggests that most voters in India view elections as free and fair (Rao 2004). Furthermore, since the turnout figures in Table 2.1 show that (1) the poor in India vote in numbers comparable to other economic

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<sup>25</sup> Findings of a project on rights and representation of the poor in developing countries currently being run from the University of Sussex provide further support. Typically the density of non-governmental and civic organizations is higher in cities. In his study of these organizations in two of India's largest metropolises Delhi and Chennai, Harriss (2005, 2007) finds that when it comes to issues related to governance poor citizens do not turn to these organizations, instead they either approach the political parties, or go directly to the state. The study also finds that these organizations are not membership based and when they are, most of the members do not belong to low-income families.

categories, and (2) the Dalits vote in slightly higher numbers than other ethnic groups, coercion could only be occurring through the practice of “proxy voting.” Akin to ballot snatching, proxy voting occurs when the marginalized are prevented from actually voting, so that their votes are cast by others. Yet, the success of ethnic parties representing marginalized groups in states infamous for proxy voting (namely Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), points towards the low prevalence of this phenomenon in India.

Today, a prominent explanation for high Dalit turnout is that patronage or patron-client relations influence the vote in India (Chandra 2004). This explanation comes in the following form: citizens exchange their votes for favors, mostly everyday services that any state must provide. On election day, citizens turn up to vote for the most desirable patrons, if they have a choice, or support the one in front of them, if they do not. Undermining this explanation, however, is the fact that, though elected bodies wield significant power in India, the state is not constituted by the executive and the legislature alone. In addition to the division of power between the national and state executive (a feature of India’s federal system), the bureaucracy and the courts also comprise the state and are responsible for its functioning.

The patronage argument thus exaggerates the influence that politicians have in proportion to other organs of the state in its every day running. Moreover, promises made during elections have fairly low credibility with voters. The poor simply lack the individual or collective clout to hold their patrons accountable. The poor are not well-organized and lack access to watchdog institutions like the media and the courts. To make matters worse, the high turnover of elected representatives means that candidates have few incentives to respond to the needs of the poor. As such, voters have little

confidence in candidates (various rounds of the National Election Survey in India). Patronage networks do exist, but the consumers of services offered by such networks are limited in number and tend to belong to the middle-income category.

Finally, a variant of the patronage explanation suggests that citizens, in this case Dalits, vote because they are offered direct material benefits like money to vote.<sup>26</sup> This, the bribery argument, rests on anecdotal evidence suggesting that voters are bribed a few days before or even on election day with food, alcohol, and sometimes money. This argument fails to explain the Dalit turnout for several reasons. First, these actions have come under increasing scrutiny by the largely independent Election Commission over the years. Second, the monitoring problem faced by the candidate or the party, especially during parliamentary elections when the size of the electoral district is very large, makes such actions less profitable. Parties and candidates do not have the means to ensure if those who were bribed showed up to vote, and if they did, actually voted for them. Third, if bribing worked as a mechanism to bring voters to the polling booth to support candidates, incumbents in India would hold a massive advantage given their access to state resources for the most efficient distribution of bribes to their supporters.<sup>27</sup> As pointed out earlier, incumbency is perceived as a huge disadvantage in India, with incumbent candidates and political parties losing an overwhelming number of elections.

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<sup>26</sup> Surveys conducted after the 1989 and 1991 elections provide clear evidence that claims which tie voting in India to money are anecdotes. In both surveys, over 80 percent of the respondents said they did not know of money being exchanged for casting a ballot. There was no difference across different levels of socioeconomic status.

<sup>27</sup>For local elections (where the size of the electoral district is relatively smaller), in which the candidate and the voter are more likely to be known to each other, the monitoring problem is not that severe. Also, the supervision of these elections by an independent body tends to be poor and voters may respond to direct material inducements.

In this section I have identified two frameworks within which motivation for voting is attributed: first, a civic duty-based framework where motivation is rooted in civic duty; second, an interest-based framework where motivation is rooted in explanations based on the principle of reciprocity such as bribery, patronage, and targeted policies. According to the SES-based explanations discussed above, citizens belonging to higher SES are more likely to possess both the interest-based and civic duty-based motivations. Patronage-based explanations view voting as a means to attain a particular interest or a set of interests. I have also highlighted that neither explanation can account for the decision of a vast majority of marginalized voters (namely Dalit voters) to show up to vote. Based on evidence gathered through 80 focus groups involving 1200 participants and 400 open-ended interviews across the four Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, I propose an alternate framework to understand voting pattern among the marginalized.<sup>28</sup> In the following section, I use modal responses of focus group and interview respondents to illustrate what it means to be marginalized. Modal responses are those that appeared most frequently in the content of the testimonies provided during the interviews and focus groups.

### ***Dalits as Marginalized Citizens***

#### *Social marginalization*

Although the practice of untouchability has declined over time in the public domain, in India, a recent countrywide study finds that it is still widely practiced in the private domain (Shah, 2006). It is important to note that the salience of caste identity is

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<sup>28</sup> The localities for the focus groups and the individuals for the interviews were randomly selected from the voter lists maintained by the state election commission.

much higher in rural areas than in urban areas.<sup>29</sup> With the exception of Maharashtra, a large majority of Dalits reside in rural areas where they own little land and are predominantly poor.<sup>30</sup> Caste remains the organizing principle of village life in rural India, determining place of residence, marriage ties, and occupation patterns. Rural areas also report the worst acts of caste-based atrocities and humiliation.

In focus group discussions, certain issues related to the treatment of Dalits surfaced repeatedly: harassment of Dalit women by men from higher castes, exclusion from the village commons and dominant-caste localities, and denial of temple entry and the use of common water source. In some cases, the respondents were unwilling to discuss these issues in a public setting because they feared the dominant castes. Within each state, this intimidation was most visible in villages where Dalits were heavily outnumbered. Across the states, it was less visible in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu and more pronounced in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

#### *Dalit voices on social marginalization*

In addition to reporting instances of social mistreatment and harassment by other communities, Dalits also often report feeling powerless to change the local social order. Respondents in Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh reported that Dalits could not fight back even when attacked: “We have to be careful. The sashan (police and state administration) is always with them (the dominant caste).” In Bihar, a female agricultural worker had a direct response: “Without outside help, how does a poor

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<sup>29</sup> In urban areas beyond the last name and place of residence, there are few markers of caste. In these areas localities and neighborhoods often come to be associated with caste or regional identities.

<sup>30</sup> Since a vast majority of Dalits are poor and still live in rural areas (over 75 percent) the surveys and focus groups sampled largely on poor Dalits residing in rural areas.

family take on the dominant caste? Everyone and anyone can control our lives in this village. We are like cattle—(we) will work for food and never protest.” In another village in the district, a brick kiln worker voiced the same point: “Raising one’s voice here is futile. If you do, either become a rebel and pick up the gun or leave the village. I have a family to support—these options are not open to me.” In Tamil Nadu, in a district known for its caste-based tensions, a group of young Dalit farmers reacted differently: “If we are attacked, we will hit back. We will not turn to the law, instead (we will) pay back in kind.” Even though there are laws that punish atrocities and protect the rights of Dalits, the implementation of these laws remains weak at best.

In the interviews, respondents reported that individuals sometimes approached the courts for assistance. For most, however, turning to the judicial system was not seen as a viable proposition. Respondents cited cases that had languished in the courts for many years as well as the prohibitive costs of fighting court cases. “Those with land and assets can use courts,” said one respondent, “we cannot.” “Going to the police is futile,” reported another, “they don’t register the complaints and, even when they do, they will not protect us from the reprisals.”

### *Economic marginalization*

In addition to vulnerability to social indignations, humiliations, and atrocities because of their ethnicity, Dalits share the experience of poverty with the poor belonging to other ethnic groups. India’s record on poverty reduction has been mixed at best over the past sixty years. India has performed better than countries in sub-Saharan Africa, yet fallen behind those in East and Southeast Asia (Varshney 2001). The

poverty rate has continued to decline and the number of citizens living below the poverty line has fallen from 55 percent in 1973 to 36 percent in 1993 and 26 percent in 1999-2000 (India Human Development Report, 2002). Indicators such as infant mortality, life expectancy, and literacy have improved during the same period. Yet, significant problems persist on the state's performance with regards to the quantity, quality, and access to public services it provides to the citizens (Devarajan and Shah 2004). Even as literacy rates have risen, school dropout rates remain high in government-run schools which according to a World Bank study suffer from poor infrastructure and rampant teacher absenteeism. Similarly, despite lower child mortality rates, 40 percent of children in India suffer from stunted growth owing to malnutrition (National Family Health Survey, 2006). The public provision of services is still poor in the areas of housing, electricity, clean drinking water, and sanitation. Half of rural households in India are without electricity connections (National Rural Infrastructure Survey, 2007)<sup>31</sup> and only 21 percent of the total spending on health care in the country is state funded.

The poor end up bearing the brunt of these shortfalls in public services since they lack resources for private substitutes. Although one might put the state's poor record down to lack of resources alone, audits of state services suggest otherwise. These audits have established high levels of leakage in the resources allocated for the poor. This leakage is attributed to both the administrative costs of service delivery and corruption. Indeed, in a recent study, the World Bank listed improving accountability of the public service delivery system to the citizens as one of the fundamental reforms required for poverty alleviation (India Development Policy Review, 2006).

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<sup>31</sup> Two thirds of the total Indian population still resides in rural areas.

Since Dalits are predominantly poor, this issue directly impacts them. Although the delivery of public services varies across the four states in the study with Bihar and Uttar Pradesh lagging Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the provision of basic services for Dalits lags behind the provision of the same services for other social groups even though the majority of Dalits live within the same village boundaries as these other groups.

*Dalit voices on economic marginalization*

The focus group discussions reflected this variation in access to public services as well. In those localities where Dalits did not have access to services such as schooling, electricity, and healthcare, they did not discuss these in any detail. In Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, states where access to some of these services is significantly better than Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the respondents had much more to say on their quality. The comment of a Dalit villager in Bihar captured the predicament succinctly: “What is there to complain about? Despite numerous promises, we have never had any electricity and the roads have always been bad in this area—not much has changed for us. My parents were agricultural laborers and things are no different for me and my two brothers.” In Uttar Pradesh, many respondents talked about the paths and roads in their areas that get repaired once every few years only to disappear after the first monsoon rain. “I have lived in this village for forty years,” said an old agricultural laborer, “but no progress has visited us here. I have been to the cities—so much has changed there—but in our village hardly anyone has a pukka (conventionally constructed) house or electricity.” A Dalit farmer in Maharashtra said, “We have electricity only in name.

With daily power cuts lasting twelve hours, what is the point of having power lines?” Women in Tamil Nadu talked about the lack of drinking water during droughts: “We have been asking for a water tanker, but it comes once every two weeks. We hear all kinds of claims which the government is making, but our situation has gone from bad to worse.”

Policy neglect, leakage, and denial of access have all been cited as reasons for the persistence of high levels of deprivation among Dalits. Yet this persistence also points towards a weakness in the meaning of democratic accountability of the state and the elected representatives who man it.

#### *Accountability of the state*

The poor in India are constrained by time and resources. They are without the support of intermediate organizations like associations and unions, are rarely the focus of media attention, and are reluctant to approach the judiciary. As citizens, the poor are especially prone to being invisible. Poorer people, claims Stuart Corbridge (2005), often see the state when the state decides to see them. The poor are unable to hold their elected representatives and the officials of the state administration accountable outside of elections.

#### *Dalit voices on their relationship with the state*

The testimony offered by respondents affirms the lack of state accountability for Dalit economic and social rights. The participants were asked in the focus groups and interviews about their experiences of approaching the state administration or political

workers for redressal of personal or community-related concerns. The majority reported inaction and dismissal by the officials of the local administration. One man from Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, lamented, “We do go, but no one takes us seriously. They ask us to wait for long hours and come back repeatedly. How often can one leave work to go to these offices? Sometimes for our community-related issues we go to protest at the collector's office (the highest ranking government official in a district), but if we protest everyday, where will we eat from?” In Nagpur, Maharashtra, a group of Dalit women reported, “During the state assembly’s yearly session in this city, we take out a procession to highlight our issues, but the government is blind to our needs.” In one urban locality in Uttar Pradesh, the respondents said, “We have complained on numerous occasions against the school teacher. She does not show up to teach two to three times every week. But no action has been taken. In fact we have been threatened by the department that they will not appoint any teacher to our area.”

Another group of respondents said, “Even when there is an emergency like in the times of disease or death in the family, we are asked for bribes to get access to hospital beds.” In the absence of family assets and quality education, the problem of finding employment is especially acute amongst the Dalit youth. “Our boys don't get jobs because they cannot bribe the official,” said a daily wageworker in Patna, Bihar. “If we had the money for the bribes, would we be living in this squalor?” In a settlement in Uttar Pradesh, the respondents said, “We don't have any influence in the government and without influence what is the point of sending children to school? How will they ever get a job?” The observations at the district-welfare and block-level offices support these testimonies. Out of the sixty-four individuals interviewed across four states, only

eighteen said they were satisfied after meeting officials. Often the individuals inquired if I knew the official and if I could help them. In the meetings that could be observed, the poor petitioner showed enormous deference and supplication towards the state official. Here once again, the petitioners were more deferential in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as compared to Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

Today, Dalits are guaranteed representation in village councils and one-third of village council presidencies are reserved for Dalits.<sup>32</sup> Across most of the villages with reserved village presidencies and council memberships, I observed that Dalit representatives had little to say in the village council unless they came from a wealthy household. Sometimes these men openly acknowledged they were in no position to represent the interests of their community. A village council member in Uttar Pradesh said, “I go when I am told about the council meeting, but I don’t say much. Who will listen to me? I have to live in the same village—how do I talk frankly to people who are more powerful? I may need their help tomorrow in an emergency.” A village council president in Tamil Nadu said, “Without resources, who has a voice?”

The role of party workers in respective localities was also probed during the focus group discussions and interviews. Almost everywhere, focus group participants reported, “We do contact party workers in our locality, but we only get assurances. The party worker is one of us—he can only do so much.” In one-on-one interactions and in the open-ended interviews, individuals reported party workers sometimes act as intermediaries for arranging jobs or loans and getting BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards. But according to the respondents, few workers were able to respond when approached

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<sup>32</sup> India has three tiers of elected governments. After the national parliament and state assemblies, Panchayats (Village councils) and urban municipal bodies form the third tier.

with individual and community-related issues. More often than not, the party worker expressed his inability to assist. On occasion, party workers even asked for bribes. A daily wage worker in Uttar Pradesh responded to my inquiries about this practice: “Where is the money to pay these bribes? All loyalties are only for elections, after which it is business as usual. Who cares about the poor?”

In an effort to clarify the issue, a party worker in Maharashtra explained further: “Look, I can go to an official in the municipal office with the petitions and requests, but he does not work for free—no one does. Moreover, political pressure can be put only when it is a matter related to hundreds, if not thousands, or if the newspapers and television are reporting on it—then the politician gets interested.” Another party worker in Tamil Nadu reported similarly: “Personal matters require money.” Party workers in Uttar Pradesh also expressed their inability to help: “First, our party has to be in power or at least the electoral district should be in our hand. When this is the case, we often try to represent the problems of our area, but we are small people in the party hierarchy.” Another worker in Uttar Pradesh stated, “It takes time for our turn to arrive.” Similarly, a worker in Bihar pointed out, “These are poor localities, no one in the administration takes them seriously.” A worker in Tamil Nadu also mentioned, “Our importance only increases during the elections, so that is the only time when something can be done.”

Some party workers expressed anger when informed about the set of issues brought up during the focus groups and interviews in their localities. In Uttar Pradesh, one party worker said, “We are the only hope of these people and they are still complaining. Who else has ever asked after their welfare or tried to do something for them?”

Overall the political intermediaries were not meeting the needs of the residents of the localities where the focus group discussions and interviews were conducted. The intervention was at best sporadic and at worst entirely absent. The economic marginalization of Dalits limits their opportunities to escape social marginalization. Yet the Dalits' social exclusion partly explains their economic marginalization. Together the two prevent Dalits from establishing a relationship with political actors based on reciprocity. Unable to hold these actors accountable, Dalits largely experience a relationship of neglect, evidenced by arbitrary and sporadic intervention by the state. Dalits nevertheless look to the state for the provision of services. In a study of 1400 respondents conducted in Delhi, Chandhoke (2005) found that over 80 percent of the citizens surveyed held the state responsible for the provision of basic services like health care, electricity, sanitation, and environmental cleanliness. A minuscule number held private providers, community organizations, and non-governmental organizations responsible for the provision of these services. "The state, it is evident from our findings continues to loom large in the collective imagination when it comes to providing the basic conditions that enable people to live a life of dignity," argues Chandhoke.

But why do poor hold this perception when the state regularly disappoints? According to Chandhoke, the preeminence of the state in public imagination is an outcome of state practice and its rhetoric. The Indian state controls a substantial part of the national resources and public service delivery systems. Furthermore, the rhetoric of the Indian state has promised much to its citizens, including jobs, housing, health care, poverty eradication, subsidized food, and sanitation facilities. Even as the state has fallen short on these commitments, it has become supplanted in the public imagination

as the arbiter of collective good over a period of sixty years. The state's programs, its administrative structure, and its politicization through parties and movements have contributed to this process.

A few observations and caveats are in order before I proceed further. The visible difference between the provision of state services to Dalits in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra on one hand, and in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh on the other, did not impact the nature of the discussions across the states. The discussions almost always highlighted a lack of accountability on the part of the state administration and party workers. These observations show that regardless of differences in outcomes of state policies towards the marginalized across the states, in their respective localities, these citizens perceive their relationship with the state similarly. They feel the state does not respond to their needs. When they approach the state, it dismisses them or does not take them seriously. I did, however, observe a significant difference in the willingness of Dalits to be assertive in the face of state neglect. Dalits in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra were far more willing to challenge the claim of the state administrators and party workers as compared to Dalits in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The focus group data also provide confirmation for Dreze and Sen's (1996) observation that the frequency and intensity of complaints is positively correlated with the performance of public delivery systems. In other words, voters complained more about the provision of public services in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu where they were both conditioned to receiving these services and felt entitled to more and better services. Democratic theory understands this behavior as an "endowment effect": citizen expectations of the state are informed by the initial endowment of state provisions

(Sunstein, 1993). This suggests that even when initial endowment levels are higher (i.e. they have a larger bundle of service provisions), for the poor, a lack of a voice in the process of delivery means a higher discontentment with the provision, resulting in higher grievance levels against the state. This explains the paradox of why the poor in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra (areas with a higher quantum of state provisions) complained more about the state than did the respondents in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (areas with a lower quantum of state provision). But how have the Dalits in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra had higher access to higher quantum of state services as compared to Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu is a question that I will return to in the final chapter of the dissertation.

Next, I turn to the ideas and intuitions developed in the literature on citizenship and resistance to propose a relational explanation to account for the motivations of Dalits to participate in elections.

#### *Why citizenship and resistance?*

The answer to this question is located in the meaning of marginalization from the standpoint of those who experience it. Dalits perceive marginalization with respect to the other ethnic groups in Indian society. They also perceive marginalization with respect to the state. Since other ethnic groups and the state are actors on the electoral stage, it therefore makes sense to interpret the actions of Dalits in the light of their perceptions of the relationships with these two entities.

Being poor, a vast majority of Dalits seek intervention by the state for greater provision of their basic needs. In urban areas they fear the predation on their rights by

the state. Yet, Dalits can make the claims on the state only as citizens. Exercising their franchise on election day provides Dalits the opportunity to emphasize their status as citizens. In this sense, voting can be compared to the value the poor assign to the acquisition of public distribution system or employment guarantee cards issued by the state. In India, the poor seek after these items because, even while failing to deliver the services for which they were originally designed, they still provide proof of citizenship and official identity.

As members of a stigmatized and subordinate group, Dalits also lack the opportunities to offer resistance openly against the daily indignities and humiliation directed toward them by others. However, on election day, Dalits can demonstrate their equality by taking part in a public act with those who look down upon them and often mistreat them. Viewed this way, voting constitutes symbolic resistance against domination. As it provides no immediate changes to the Dalit voters' lives, voting remains symbolic. Yet the symbolism of resistance holds meaning because it is displayed in an arena where power differentials matter. The interviews with members of dominant groups in the villages demonstrate that the Dalits' equal status in the electoral arena is indeed resented. The attempts made by dominant castes to either control or snatch the Dalit vote illustrate this power dynamic. Today, the extreme precautions taken by the Election Commission to secure the electoral process from the influence of both coercion and material inducements suggest that the electoral arena is not neutral to the power relationships. These factors are what make the electoral arena a salient site for demonstrating resistance.

## *Voting As an Act of Citizenship Affirmation and Resistance*

### *Citizenship*

The idea of citizenship and its accompanying rights are central to democratic politics. An overview of extent theories highlights the situation of marginalized citizens whose voting pattern represents citizenship affirmation in the wake of state neglect and predation. Over the centuries, a variety of approaches to define citizenship have been proposed. One set of approaches focuses entirely on restrictive conditions. For example, Aristotle and later Mill proscribed that citizenship rights should be restricted to only those possessing the capability to reason and calculate the general will of the community, thus providing the basis on which the poor were denied franchise.<sup>33</sup>

Another approach towards citizenship is centered on the form citizenship takes, individual or communitarian. Political theorists have debated liberal and communitarian approaches to citizenship. The former privileges the relationship of the state with the individual over all other ties. The latter emphasizes the significance of the context of community. Theoretically speaking, communitarians question the assumption that we can analyze individuals outside of the social context. Communitarians argue that identities, interests, preferences, meanings, and capacities are socially constructed and rooted in communities. In India, the state follows both the liberal and communitarian approaches towards Dalits. It not only guarantees Dalits equal individual rights, but also extends community-based rights to them through affirmative action policies guaranteeing representation in legislatures, state administration, and the public

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<sup>33</sup> Indeed this is not an entirely unpopular argument for a section of the Indian middle classes. See Sangvi (2003)

education system (Galanter 1984).

Yet another approach towards citizenship has focused on its content. T.H Marshall (1964) drew a distinction between political, civic, and social rights. While, in the West, these three rights were phased in, often on the back of struggles undertaken by excluded groups (Tilly 1996), in India, they were granted at once with the promulgation of the constitution in 1950. As is evident from the preceding discussion, possession of individual and community rights does not automatically guarantee access to them in a society defined by deeply rooted social inequality. For marginalized citizens in such societies, rights often exist in a notional sense, with access to them remaining sporadic or nonexistent. Social and income inequality also prevent nominal citizens from accessing the means to draw attention to their rights deficits. But these citizens still need the state and seek the rights they have been assigned. Thus, any opportunity to register their citizenship holds significance in their lives.

### *Resistance*

Writing on caste inequality in India, Myron Weiner (1999: 195) observes, "Perhaps no other major society in recent history has known inequalities so gross, so long preserved, or so ideologically well entrenched." Scholars of the caste system and its attributes have two opposing views on how deeply the sense of servitude and lowliness has been imbibed by subaltern groups. According to some, the internalization of the norms of hierarchy among the subordinate groups has made their members willing participants in domination and exclusion (Dumont, 1988).<sup>34</sup> There is a body of

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<sup>34</sup> For a clear and provocative exposition of a view on agency of the subaltern in their suppression and exploitation, see Kuran, 1995, pp196-205.

literature that does not fully accept this view. For example, in *Weapons of the Weak*, James Scott (1985) suggests that power-laden situations are nearly always inauthentic. To explain his point, he draws a distinction between routine compliance and routine resistance practiced by the poor. Both types of acts are conscious of the structure of power and its ability to reward and punish. The exercise of power or its threat, according to Scott, drives the full transcript of beliefs and values under-ground or backstage. What is then left on the surface, visible to the naked eye, is dutiful compliance and deference. In light of this insight, it should not be difficult to imagine that servitude was resisted among the lower castes.

Furthermore, evidence of compliance should not be understood uncritically as complete internalization of the lower status accorded to the poor. In recent times, anthropologists working among subaltern communities in India have discovered stories and myths of origin that tell of a glorious and exalted past in which the caste group enjoyed higher status (Deliege 1997; Gupta 2000). As Kuran (1995) has pointed out, however, stories of a glorious past and higher status in the caste system do not imply the rejection of the idea of the caste system and the principle of social hierarchy. More than any other factor, the creation and survival of the democratic state in India has undermined the moral legitimacy of the hierarchically organized Hindu caste system (Weiner 1999). Dahl (2006) reminds us that in democratic societies, keeping the downstairs out of the power arrangements permanently is impossible. By granting all members the same set of political rights, the Indian constitution has set the process of making citizens out of subjects in motion through the intervention of democratic institutions. This process is ongoing (Varshney 2000). Nevertheless, the contradiction

of enjoying the rights associated with citizenship in principle but not in practice remains true for those languishing at the bottom of the social and income hierarchy.

A well-developed literature on resistance and protest movements provides a rich account from across the world of how the marginalized engage domination from the state and other social groups. First, Scott (1985 and 1990) argues that, given the poor's paucity of opportunity and resources, their resistance is often routine, but must remain hidden. Scott locates resistance to political, cultural, and ideological hegemony among the daily acts of the relatively powerless. He sees evidence of resistance in thefts, sabotage, and foot-dragging. Robin Kelly (1994) develops Scott's insights by illuminating the everyday forms of black resistance in the Jim Crow South and contemporary urban settings. O'Brien and Li (2006) point toward a second variant of resistance: when the marginalized succeed at persuading the state to assist them by appealing to its ideology or turning to competing arms of state authority.

A third variant provided by the social movements literature, analyzes extraordinary circumstances (such as when the opportunity to mobilize appears) in which the marginalized members of society directly confront oppressive forces (Piven and Cloward 1977; Tarrow 1998; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). I turn to this last insight on resistance. The gradual maturing of democracy in the Indian context, with regular and free elections, has meant that the electoral arena offers the opportunity for the marginalized to resist their lower social status. If resistance in whatever form it exists is the key motif of political behavior of the marginalized, then resistance must inform our understanding of their electoral behavior. Until we understand these connections, we are unlikely to produce a coherent account of the politics of the

marginalized.

This chapter argues that citizens interpret the act of voting based on where they stand in relation to the state and rest of the society. For socially and economically marginalized citizens, neglected and intimidated by the state and discriminated against by members of other ethnic groups, voting represents empowerment. These citizens view voting as a valued right rather than an exchange for goods and services. Elections then represent a window of opportunity for the marginalized citizen to affirm his or her individual citizenship with the state. For, if allowed to vote freely on election day, nominal citizens resemble rights-availing citizens, for however brief a period.<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, this affirmation of citizenship represents self-worth for the marginalized. On the other, it is sometimes the only way for nominal citizens to protect themselves from the state. Despite their lower social status, on the day of the election, Dalits become political equals to groups situated above them in the social hierarchy. They become competitors to those who frequently dominate them. Under these conditions, we should expect the marginalized not to withdraw from the electoral process, but rather to engage it, albeit based on different motivations than those of other voters. The discussion on voting that appears next will illustrate this argument.

### ***Why Vote?***

Based upon what the literature states about participation for citizens who do not possess formal civic education, or are not in a position to organize around their interests, and hold their representatives accountable to enforce commitments made by these representatives, voting should be perceived as a useless exercise. Yet, the figures

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<sup>35</sup> Nominal citizens are citizens who possess rights, however, are mostly unable to avail of them.

on turnout indicate that such citizens do *not* view voting in this way. Returning to Table 2.1, the most dramatic feature of the turnout figures is the lack of any significant variation across the SES and ethnic categories.

When the Dalit respondents were asked why they showed up to vote when both the state and their elected representatives were unresponsive to their needs, the response was similar across different states and poor localities. Dalits were voting to affirm their citizenship and to exercise the one right which the Indian state goes to great lengths to extend to them. In one focus group after another, the response was ‘voting is my right.’ Often ignored and neglected by the state, Dalits value the right to elect governments. Very often respondents insisted, “Why shouldn’t I vote? After all this is the only right I have.” Many respondents also cited voting as proof of their importance: “If we don’t vote, how will governments be elected? This is the one day, when the state comes to our doorstep—candidates and parties come to ask us for our votes; the state needs us.”

As one poor villager in Uttar Pradesh put it, “I *am* because I vote on election day—otherwise, what is my stature in this society?” Another participant said, “Election is the one event which ties me to the government. Politicians, people like you, administrators, everyone comes looking for us. If we did not vote, there would be no elections and we would be left for dead.” An elderly woman said, “Governments rule because I vote, I cannot stop voting even if the government is shameless and has forgotten its duty towards me. If I don’t, it will never think of me or people like me.”

Focus group discussions in urban slums brought up another motivation for voting. In large urban centers like Bombay and Delhi, Dalits who live in slums fear the ad hoc coercion of the state in addition to coping with state neglect. The primary fear is

that if they do not turn up to vote, the politicians may not protect their settlement and the municipal authorities could destroy their hutments. The premium on land is high in cities. The poor who are often without land entitlements can arbitrarily get uprooted from shantytowns and squatter colonies.

For the poor, including the Dalits, voting has become a well-rehearsed act. Voting is a right to which they have had regular and uninterrupted access, a sharp contrast to other rights which Dalits are granted through laws, but are not able to access because of poor state policy implementation. Like the poor of other ethnic groups, the Dalit poor lack the power to frame or influence public discourse and draw attention to their issues. On election day, however, they get the opportunity to exercise the one right the state can guarantee; they take advantage of this opportunity and show up to vote.

Since the marginalized in India gained citizenship and associated rights in a moment of constitutional enlightenment rather than through protracted struggles, the relationship between the marginalized citizen and the state has remained underdeveloped and largely nominal. Elections formalize the relationship between marginalized citizens and the state. Participation provides the marginalized with the authority to have expectations from the state.

The focus group discussions and interviews also pointed towards another motivation for voting among the Dalit respondents, particularly among Dalits living in rural areas where ethnic identity is more influential in informing private as well as public interactions. The enforcement of hierarchy is still strong in these areas, and Dalits often made references to voting by others while explaining their decision to vote. The following responses were especially common in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and much

less so in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The respondents across the states pointed out, “Voting is a right enjoyed by everyone, we cannot be excluded from it, and so we should vote.” “On the day of the election, I am equal to the Bhumiards (the local dominant caste), why wouldn’t I vote,” said one respondent in Bihar. Another in Uttar Pradesh pointed out, “Our elders tell us that earlier we were not allowed to vote. When people from our community went to the polling booth, they were told, ‘Go home, your vote has already been cast.’ Today no one can do that.” In parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Dalits are still the first ones to show up to the polling booth. These states have an infamous history of proxy voting on behalf of the marginalized through the capture of polling booths by dominant castes. This practice has been reduced significantly since the 1970s thanks to the extensive security arrangements made by the Indian state to ensure free and fair polling. “Voting is essential,” said a villager in Meerut in Uttar Pradesh, “otherwise we cannot demonstrate our power to the Gujjars (another dominant caste) of our village.” In a village in Madurai in Tamil Nadu, an old political worker explained that elections are the only time that Dalits became respectable for everyone, including those who otherwise would not even venture near their houses. The worker went on, “On the day of the elections we are kings because we hold something of value. It is the only time to remind others of our importance. Elections are good for us—we should have more of them.”

While defining resistance, Scott focuses more on the intention behind the act than on its consequences. In the same vein, the act of voting does not directly improve the social status of the Dalit voter. Yet, participating in a public act that is the same for Dalits as it is for those who regard themselves as social superiors becomes a form of

resistance for Dalits.

The responses Dalits provided to questions regarding democratic institutions in the National Election Survey in 2004 are consistent with the above discussion. A large majority of Dalits (including poor Dalits), prefer democracy to authoritarian rule (67.5 percent), express faith in elected institutions (70.6 percent), and believe their vote makes a difference (62.2 percent).

The above discussion has focused strictly on the account of the Dalits falling in the low-income category. Nevertheless, a small but growing number of Dalit voters falls into the middle- and upper-income category. The interviews with the members of this category and the political party workers revealed that an overwhelming number of beneficiaries of state patronage came from this upper and middle-income group of Dalits. In general, these individuals had better access to the state. Moreover, although some did report facing discriminatory behavior from others, they were better placed to challenge it. During the focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews with these Dalits, a different set of reasons for voting was furnished. In a large number of instances, there was an expectation of direct benefits in return for supporting particular candidates and parties.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has examined the contexts of marginalization for Dalits. It has argued that experiences of marginalization influence the electoral participation of Dalits, in particular, their motivations to show up to vote. Despite their marginalized status, Dalits remain enthusiastic about voting in elections and express their faith in the

democratic process. Both state neglect and threat of ad hoc coercion turn elections into a referendum on Dalit citizenship—Dalits participate to reaffirm their status as citizens. In states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, elections also present an opportunity for Dalits to assert their political equality in front of members of communities who regard them as socially inferior. Although largely symbolic, this assertion constitutes resistance. In this sense elections represent the momentary convergence of the conceptual and everyday reality of democracy in India, when nominal citizens become real citizens.

The following chapters will show why this affirmation of citizenship takes different forms across different states and why the ethnic or caste lens is deployed by Dalits to select parties in some states and not in others. I will show that this divergence is driven by how Dalits came to be mobilized historically.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Accounting For Ethnic Party Performance**

The literatures in ethnic, electoral, and party politics suggest a number of possible explanations for variation in the performance of Dalit ethnic parties. This chapter will consider some of these explanations. In the process, it will highlight why the existing set of approaches is unable to account satisfactorily for the variation in the observed performance of Dalit ethnic parties. These explanations and approaches mostly run into three problems: (1) Many are unable to account for the variation in the performance of the ethnic parties; (2) Others rely on mechanisms that are short on empirical support; and, (3) Finally, these explanations do not engage marginalization. They do not take into account the abundance of constraints, the paucity of opportunities, and the distinctness in the motivations for mobilization among a marginalized group.

#### ***Institutional Accounts of Ethnic Party Performance***

A prominent and influential literature engaging ethnic party performance turns to electoral institutions in search of causal explanations. According to it, these institutions provide the opportunities and incentives for the success and failure of ethnic mobilization in the electoral arena. Broadly speaking, institutional theories explore how electoral rules affect the performance of political parties.

They show how some rules for deciding winners and losers in elections are more favorable for the rise of ethnic parties, how changes in rules can determine along which cleavages voters are mobilized, and how institutional expansion into new domains opens new opportunities for formerly excluded groups to mobilize.

When an ethnic group is dispersed as opposed to being territorially concentrated, a proportional representation (PR) system is more conducive to the appearance and success of emergent ethnic parties. PR systems allow parties with limited vote shares to enter legislatures, where they can potentially access state discretionary funds, gain a higher public profile, and even join governing coalitions. By contrast, single member district plurality (SMDP) systems – such as the one followed in India – are ill-suited for the growth of ethnic parties. This is because they award seats on a winner-take-all basis. Despite having an electoral system that should discourage small parties, in India small parties have only proliferated over time (Hasan 2002). Add to this the fact that across most electoral districts no one caste enjoys a majority and different castes share the same village boundary. In this sense, the success of caste-based ethnic parties in India represents institutional failure. This is because the institutional incentives should encourage voter choice to be based on local interest rather than their ethnic identity.

Another possible explanation for ethnic party success could be electoral redistricting. We know partisan redistricting can result in increasing territorial concentration of an ethnic group and create ethnic majority districts, which are more favorable for ethnic party success. However, in India, the responsibility for redistricting rests with an independent election commission. Like the electoral system, rules for drawing districts are uniform across India.

Scholars have proposed that a shift in institutions affects electoral cleavage selection by political parties. For instance, Posner (2005) in his work on Zambia has argued an institutional switch from a one party system to a multiparty system results in the change in the type of ethnic cleavage along which parties mobilize voters. He finds that during periods of multiparty rule, language group cleavages serve as the central axis of coalition-building and political conflict in Zambia, whereas, during periods of one-party rule, tribal cleavages play this role. In India, although the electoral rules have not changed, the fragmentation of the party system has altered the incentive structure.

While India has always been a multiparty democracy, both national and state politics was dominated by the Congress Party for a significant part of its independent history. Lately, the longstanding dominance of the Congress Party has ended. This has been accompanied by party proliferation, party system fragmentation, and the appearance of coalition governance. Party system fragmentation has favorably altered the incentive structure for ethnic cleavages to become activated by ethnic parties. Yet, this alteration in the incentive structure has not produced similar effects across individual states. In some states the party system has fragmented along ethnic or caste cleavages, while in others party system fragmentation has not taken a decidedly ethnic turn. Political and electoral institutions have been a fertile hunting ground for questions on why, when, and how parties succeed. However, these explanations are not equally successful at explaining which type of party will succeed.

Van Cott (2005), in her recent work on indigenous parties in six Latin American countries, has shown that in an open party system three institutional changes allow the ethnic parties to compete successfully: decentralization, improved access to the ballot

for aspiring parties, and the reservation of seats for ethnic minorities. Decentralization opens new playing fields for relatively weak political actors at local and regional levels, where indigenous peoples are often concentrated demographically and where fewer financial resources are necessary to compete. New laws that allow social movements to compete in elections without formally registering as political parties, or that make registration easier to achieve and maintain, enable emerging ethnic parties to compete for the first time. Reserved seats for indigenous peoples also provide a guaranteed foothold in the political system that indigenous movements can use to energize indigenous voters and to launch successful parties in nonindigenous districts.

Since the indigenous population in Latin America has historically faced exclusion, this work is especially instructive in illustrating the necessary institutional provisions to facilitate the participation and mobilization of previously excluded groups. That said, the factors highlighted by Van Cott's work cannot account for the variation in the performance of ethnic parties representing marginalized groups in India. The electoral system is the same across all the electoral districts for selecting candidates in the local, state, and national elections. Further still, electoral districts have been reserved for Dalits across all the states based on their proportional share in the population of the state. The reservation of the seats was further extended to village and municipal governance in 1987. Since these changes are a constant for all the states, they cannot account for the variation in the performance of ethnic parties.

**Table 3.1 Percentage of land ownership for Dalits across states**

State	Size Class of Ownership		
	0.00-0.50 hectare	0.51-2.00 hectare	<2.00 hectare
<i>Madhya Pradesh</i>	46	34	20
<i>Karnataka</i>	57	29	14
<i>Punjab</i>	94	3	3
<i>Bihar</i>	92	6	2
<i>Maharashtra</i>	62	24	14
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	89	10	1
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	76	21	3
<i>Rajasthan</i>	45	32	23
<i>Andhra Pradesh</i>	80	11	9
<i>Orissa</i>	79	17	4
<i>Tripura</i>	75	24	1
<i>West Bengal</i>	76	21	3
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	74	24	2
<i>Haryana</i>	87	2	11

Source: NSSO round, No 399, January-December 1992-Report No 1.Livestock holding Survey, December 1995

*Resource mobilization:*

An argument attributes the success of BSP in Uttar Pradesh to the pattern of landownership among Dalits (Kumar 2002). It suggests that since a large number of Dalits are land owners in Uttar Pradesh, the BSP has been able to mobilize resources as well as electoral support more easily in Uttar Pradesh as compared to other states. Table 3.1 provides the land ownership figures for Dalits across 14 large Indian states including the four states that comprise this study. While a large number of Dalits indeed own land in Uttar Pradesh (97%), a large majority of them are marginal farmers (76%), i.e. the land they own is often not even adequate for the purpose of subsistence. As a result, these farmers still look for work with larger landowners. It is also noteworthy that focusing on land as a resource for political mobilization in this case – where a majority of the landowners are marginal farmers – is problematic. Because even though landownership among Dalits is higher in Uttar Pradesh as compared to

Tamil Nadu, so is the poverty rate (See Table 7.2). The table also alerts us to another anomaly. If land ownership is a good predictor of ethnic party success, the Dalit party in Bihar should perform far more poorly as compared to Dalit parties in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, since Bihar has an extremely low rate of landownership among Dalits. However, we know that is not the case.

### ***Organizational Accounts of Ethnic Party Performance***

There is yet another path of inquiry that engages the puzzle of ethnic party performance. It explains the appearance of political parties by focusing on the internal rules governing political organizations. Since internally democratic parties are better equipped to accommodate new elites, they discourage the appearance of new parties. This is because these emergent elite know that by expanding their support base they can rise within their party's organization. By contrast, within centralized parties, emergent elite are prevented from rising by the already entrenched elite. The new elite are therefore more likely to leave the party organization and create their own political parties.

For example, Chandra (2004) has argued that since emergent Dalit ethnic elite could not be accommodated in the centralized Congress, they formed their own ethnic party. With the exceptions of the Communist Party and the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), almost all other parties in India are centralized, which means upward mobility is restricted across most parties for elite belonging to all ethnic groups. Why then do ethnic parties flourish only in some states?

It is also noteworthy that the emergent ethnic elite could also face another problem preventing their absorption, especially if they belong to a marginalized group.

They may not be socially acceptable to members of other groups. As such, organizational explanations focus primarily on the strategic incentives within the organization and neglect the social environment in which organizations are embedded. Often actor preferences and incentive structures within an organization are informed by the social environment of which it is a part. Party behavior reflects the organizational structure as well as the society in which the party competes. On the whole, an organizational approach places the burden of causality for the rise of an ethnic party on the elite in the ethnic group. But party formation does not guarantee party success. For party success to be attained, party platforms must align with voter preferences. The elite must be able to persuade the ethnic voter to support the party. Next, the focus shifts in this chapter to approaches that explain voter support for ethnic parties.

### ***The Value of Ethnicity for Voters***

The successful mobilization of an ethnic group by its ethnic party turns on the value of ethnicity to the members of the group in electoral politics. This inquiry into the performance of an ethnic party must identify the attribute that attaches value to ethnicity in the electoral arena. In other words, we must ask: Why does ethnicity matter to a marginalized voter? For, if the impact of ethnicity on the electoral behavior of Dalits varies, then the electoral performance of the ethnic party could also vary. The following section reviews the approaches and arguments that potentially answer this question.

Since the Hindu caste system has survived for thousands of years, it is tempting to study its current political expression using the *primordial* lens. The "primordial" or "essentialist" approach is the oldest attempt at explaining the value of ethnicity to

individuals. Scholars working in this tradition consider ethnic identity as an immutable and deeply rooted attribute human beings share (Geertz 1963; Connor 1972). The essentialist approach argues voters are predisposed to supporting their co-ethnics and ethnic party because the idea of ethnic loyalty is hardwired into their psyches. In addition to lacking empirical conformation, this is not a useful approach for a variety of reasons. First, it runs into historical problems; the caste system has not been without regular upheavals as different groups have moved in and out of the priest, warrior, trader, servant, and untouchable categories (Bayly 1999). Second, the conversion of caste into an ethnic category is a recent phenomenon that in large measure has been facilitated by state policies. Over the years, the primordial and essentialist ideas on ethnic identity have been widely contested and largely rejected. In place of the primordialist view, a consensus has developed around a set of approaches on ethnicity which argue ethnic and national identities should not be presumed as a given, rather, they should be considered a product of human design. The widespread acceptance of this view has shifted the discussion on ethnic identity to the processes of its construction, the mechanisms that are involved in these processes, and the short and long term fixity of identity.

In recent times scholars have increasingly turned to *instrumentalist* mechanisms to explain voter-party relations. The instrumentalist approach, which for the large part is founded on the principles in microeconomics, regards identity-based preferences as flexible in the short term. Its electoral version is centered on the following assumptions: (1) Ethnic preferences among rational voters are formed in response to incentives; (2) Voters select the identity that guarantees them the highest material return on their

actions; and (3) Ethnic identity is fluid, ethnic preferences are flexible, and actors always act strategically. In this sense, a purely instrumentalist approach ends up overemphasizing the accrual of material benefits over other types of benefits. It also assigns individual voters the stupendous ability to perform complex rational calculations in order to assess their benefits, often in information-constrained environments.

Chandra's work on ethnic parties relies on instrumentalist mechanisms. Building on Fearon's work, Chandra (2004) has argued that in India since ethnicity provides the most visible marker in the electoral arena, politicians turn to it for distributing patronage. Ethnicity is therefore valuable to all voters because it allows them to access state patronage. It is the principle on which patron-client ties are organized. The strategic voter picks the ethnic party on the basis of estimates of headcounts of potential ethnic patrons among different political parties. The well-informed voter is aware of the electoral prospects of political parties in her electoral district. The voter votes for the party only if the party is in a position to win, otherwise the voter plays spoiler. There are two problems this argument encounters. First, the argument is founded on the assumption that the poor are part of widespread patron-client networks. As the previous chapter has argued, this assertion is substantially without empirical foundations. To recap, those who are either part of party organization, or are in direct contact with it, are able to avail of patronage benefits emanating from elected office. Only those Dalit clients who have economic resources are better equipped to hold patrons accountable.

Yet another problem that the instrumentalist approach on ethnicity faces is that it cannot engage marginalization. The approach assumes that voters can choose between

political identities because they have access to a variety of identities. However, as has already been argued in Chapter One, for members of a marginalized group such a choice does not exist. A lack of social acceptance implies that they are unable to readily adopt new political identities. Third, there is no evidence that can confirm the high levels of voter awareness that is assumed.

The *constructivist* view of ethnicity focuses on illuminating the social and historical conditions in which ethnic preferences are embedded. Taking a long term view, it treats ethnicity as sticky. This approach implicates state policies in the process of investing value in ethnic identity. State policies such as ethnic quotas in education, state administration, and military recruitment entrench identities. Scholars argue that over time, such policies establish the repertoire of ethnic identities available for electoral mobilization. Because such policies privilege certain identities over others, they endow them with meaning (Laitin 1986; Mamdani 1996; Posner 2005).

One influential body of research emphasizes the role policies designed first by the British colonial state and, subsequently, by the postcolonial Indian state played in the construction of caste identity (Bayly 1999; Dirks 2001). This literature proffers the view that, since the state possesses the power to regulate and dispense resources, when the state becomes accustomed to seeing a particular group in a certain way that group comes to see itself similarly. In this sense, the state turns small communities with locally-rooted identities into ethnic groups. The practices of caste-based census taking and surveys introduced by the colonial state, followed later by the affirmative action policies put in place by the independent Indian state, all contribute towards the construction of a Dalit identity.

This view of the state's role in identity formation is not typical to India. In his work on Africa, Laitin (1986, 1998) illustrates the effect the guiding hand of state policy has had on the construction of political identities. In Nigeria, the former colonial state gave more importance to identities rooted in ancestral cities of the Yoruba than to religious identities. Consequently, differences based on ancestral home are more potent than religious cleavages in Yoruba society today. Likewise, Posner (2005) shows that because the colonial state of Zambia identified Zambians based on their tribal and linguistic identities, these two identities emerged as the two organizing principles in the politics of postcolonial Zambia. Also writing on Africa, Mamdani (1996) argues that by making distinctions between natives and settlers, the colonial states sowed the seeds for ethnic conflict in postcolonial Africa.

The state's extensive role in the process of identity construction in India notwithstanding, the state did not conjure these ethnic classifications out of thin air. Specifically in the case of Dalits, the principle of exclusion that assigned subordinate status to individuals based on their caste was not a colonial invention, rather it predated Britain's arrival in India. The practice of untouchability has continued (albeit in less intense forms) even since India's constitution outlawed discrimination (Charsley 1998; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1999). Moreover, the category of Dalits or Scheduled Castes (SCs) still conforms to social as well as empirical realities of deprivation.

This particular constructivist explanation posits that difference in state policies is responsible for activating ethnic identity in electoral politics. The discussion in Chapter One has already pointed out that while state policies did indeed play a role in

the construction of Dalit identity, these policies were the same for all Indian states. Yet, today, the outcomes for ethnic party performance vary.

The *postcolonial scholarship* in India offers yet another explanation for the successful mobilization of ethnic identity. It argues the independent Indian state, by enforcing nationalism on the polity, suppressed, neglected, and ignored other identity-based aspirations. Its secularism alienated the religious sentiments that have always been important to Indians, and its idea of socialism neglected the poor. This "alien provenance"(Kaviraj 2000) allegedly created the conditions for religious and caste parties to mobilize previously ignored aspirations (Chatterjee 1993; Nandi 2000; Nigam 2005). Once again, the variation in outcomes accompanying the fragmentation of the party system runs counter to this explanation. For after all, if the Indian state rode roughshod over identities, then the pattern of religious and ethnic mobilization should have been similar across all states. We should observe that Dalits turn to their ethnic parties with equal fervor during periods of opportunity. We should also observe the success of ethnic parties across all states.

The postcolonial argument relies on the formative years of India's democratic experience. It is indeed true that Nehru, India's prime minister from 1950 to 1964 had little interest in religious and caste-based politics. Yet, the Congress governments in the different states and his colleagues did not necessarily share his views and practices (Guha 2007). Furthermore, across different states, Congress and other political parties deployed both caste as well as religious appeals in politics. This leads us to the question of why there was a difference in the deployment of such appeals. Essentially, a postcolonial account of identity mobilization relies on the assumption of an autonomous

state that could neglect the identity-related aspirations of different groups in the society. This is especially problematic in a multiparty democracy. After all, why would, and how could, parties neglect the aspirations of the electorate they repeatedly turn to for support?

Scholars borrowing from *modernization* theory offer other possible causal explanations for the rise in the value of ethnicity to Dalit voters in recent times. Modernization theory regards the growth of ethnic consciousness as a byproduct of the process of industrialization and finds technological changes, such as the rise of print capitalism and television, responsible for standardizing "peoplemaking stories" by diffusing them among large populations (Anderson 1983). It suggests that where access to mass media and literacy among Dalits are higher, Dalits are bound by a common set of ideas on ethnicity, symbols, and culture. Consequently, we should observe stronger ethnic loyalties in electoral politics. Sudha Pai (2001), in her path breaking work on the rise of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, turns to this causal logic. According to her, the growth of literacy among Dalits and the appearance of a small middle class resulting from the Indian state's affirmative action policies increased ethnic consciousness among Dalits. The success of the Dalit-based ethnic party is an outcome of higher self-awareness among Dalits as a community. However Pai's pioneering work focuses on Uttar Pradesh and does not engage the experience of Dalit parties in a comparative framework in other states - where the prevalence of similar conditions does not result in the flourishing of the Dalit parties.

Counterintuitively, out of the four cases in this study, it is in states with relatively higher rates of literacy and access to mass media that Dalit ethnic parties have

performed poorly. Indicators for literacy, newspaper circulation, and radio and television ownership in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are far weaker than in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. According to the National Election Study of 2004, more Dalits in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar report that they do not have access to all three sources of information, that is newspapers, radio, and television (See Table 3.2). Yet Dalits turn to their ethnic party in much larger numbers in these states than in others.

**Table 3.2 Percentage of Dalits who said they did not watch television news, did not read the newspaper, and did not listen to a radio.**

States	Percentage
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	36.5
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	12.7
<i>Bihar</i>	34.1
<i>Maharashtra</i>	16.4

Source: Indian National Election Study (INES), 2004

For 2004, Tamil Nadu N=164, Uttar Pradesh N=327, Maharashtra N =214 and Bihar N=223

Some scholars have also illuminated another attribute accompanying modernization – the emergence of a new set of identities. In the wake of new opportunities for subordinate groups to mobilize, a demand to be recognized as social equals emerges among them (Marshall 1968; Tilly 2003; Taylor 1994). This raises the obvious question of why demands for equality must take an ethnic form; class equality can be an equally compelling motivation for the mobilization of marginalized citizens. In Europe these demands came to the fore through the struggle of labor movements. In other parts of the world, demands for recognition surfaced through anti-colonial movements and civil rights movements. Historically, when ethnicity forms the basis of exclusion for the members of a group, recognition also comes to be sought by them in the name of ethnic identity. Today, all Dalit ethnic parties proclaim their commitment to the cause of

gaining recognition for Dalits as equal citizens. Yet the appeals of these parties are more successful in galvanizing Dalit voters in some states. That having been said, the distinctness of the reasons for mobilization among subordinate groups – the search for recognition – is central to the argument to be developed in the next chapter.

### *Sociological Explanations*

The literature on ethnic parties traces its origins to sociological theories. These hold that political cleavages – on which political parties and the overall party system are based – are a reflection of social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Such cleavages grounded in rural-urban, religious, and class divisions, provided the basis for political cleavages in Europe. Social cleavage theories assume that all voters along the social cleavage share interests, are aware of them, and make voting decisions based on these interests consistently over time (Mainwaring 1999).

The central weakness of this literature is that it does not account for agency on the part of the voters being mobilized and the parties mobilizing them. In other words, we are not informed how social cleavages actually get converted into political cleavages. As a result, these theories have not been able to explain variation in outcomes. Why, for instance, do social, religious, and ethnic cleavages translate into political cleavages in some cases, but not in others? And when social cleavages do translate into political cleavages, why do the outcomes vary (Boix 1997; Kalyvas 1996)?

Political party-centered explanations help address this gap. Horowitz (1985) accounts for agency in the politicization of ethnic cleavages. According to him, ethnic

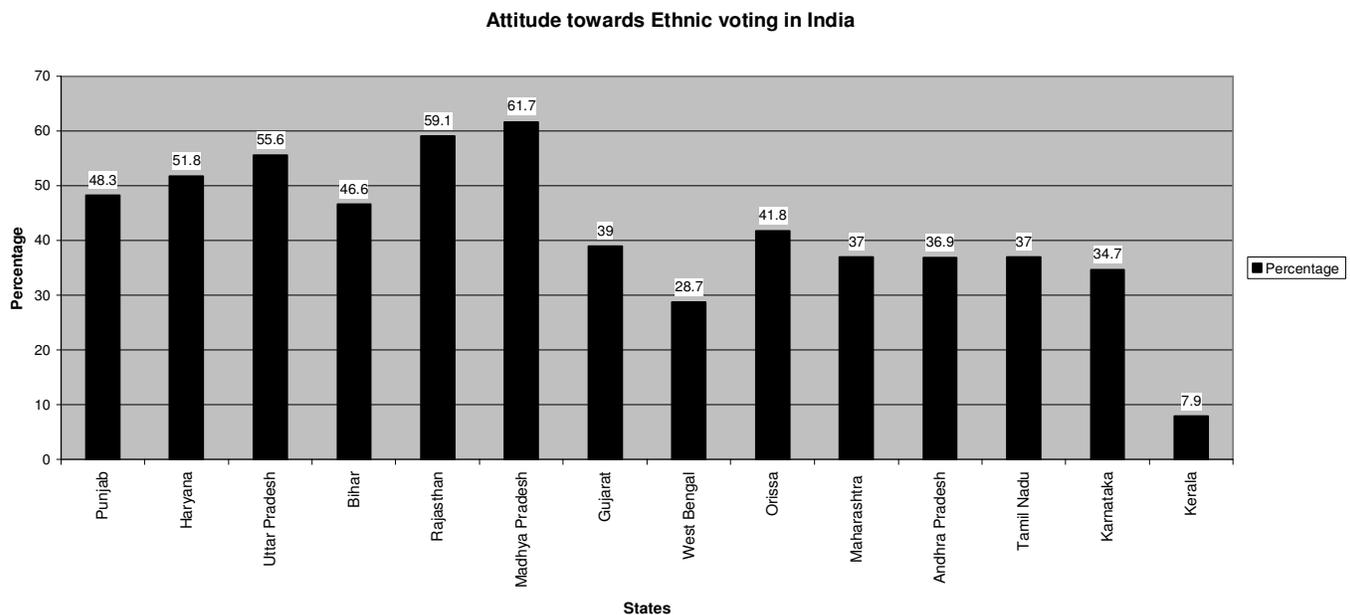
elites form political parties to fulfill their particular interests. Since ethnic identity is ascriptive, ethnic elites know that once their ethnic constituency is captured, they can count on its support. Elections turn into an ethnic census, where voters vote their ethnicity. Ethnic groups perceive shared interests and a shared sense of competition with other groups in the polity. Ethnic parties form to represent the identity of the ethnic group and in response to competing identity-based interests.

Recent work on parties in India by Chhibber (1999) and Chandra (2004) has argued that parties are the agents responsible for converting social and ethnic cleavages into political cleavages by mobilizing ethnic groups using promises of state resources. Chandra has proposed that in an information scarce electoral environment, the visibility of ethnicity makes it the best organizing principle for mobilizing voters. This then raises a set of important questions: Given a common cleavage structure and an information scarce electoral environment across all cases, why do members of a marginalized group turn to their ethnic parties in the moment of opportunity only in some states, but not in others? Why should ethnicity work as an organizing principle for Dalits, while other visible markers such as a rural, class, religious, or regional identity do not? After all, most Dalits are poor, reside in rural India, and share a regional identity with members of other caste groups. Moreover, parties mobilizing voters on the basis of rural, class and regional identities compete in elections.

The assumption that ethnic groups share ethnicity-based interests resulting in voters voting their ethnicity does not empirically hold up uniformly in the Indian context. Although basic caste cleavages are common to most Indian states, levels of ethnic solidarity during elections vary across states in India. The data from the National

Election Study of 2004 indicates that Uttar Pradesh (a Northern state) and Tamil Nadu (a Southern state) represent a larger North-South difference in the attitudes towards ethnic voting. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, ethnic group solidarity while voting is emphasized more in the Northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana as compared to the Southern states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. This then clearly shows that ethnic cleavages do not translate into ethnic solidarity among co-ethnics across all states.

**Figure 3.1 Percentage of Dalit voters who agree voting with one's caste is important**



Source: National Election Study, 2004(CSDS, New Delhi).

But a question must be addressed before proceeding further. It is plausible that the difference in levels of ethnic solidarity is a direct outcome of ethnic party mobilization – agency matters – and the high levels of ethnic solidarity in states like

Uttar Pradesh could be an outcome of Dalit party success. By contrast, lower levels of ethnic solidarity in a state like Tamil Nadu could be a consequence of ethnic party failure. Putting it differently, the reported levels of ethnic solidarity in electoral politics are endogenous to ethnic party mobilization. Yet, a quick glance at the cross-sectional comparison of the data in Figure 3.1 suggests otherwise. In states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where the party system has not fragmented and the Dalit ethnic party has not made significant progress, levels of ethnic solidarity among voters remain high. Dalit voters report higher ethnic solidarity as compared to states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh where fewer voters report that it is important to vote with co-ethnics. This then suggests that levels of ethnic solidarity among voters are not a function of ethnic party performance. There is an old adage among Indian election observers that "In India, voters don't just cast their vote, they also vote their caste". Figure 3.1 suggests that this adage is truer for some states than others. The willingness of Dalit voters to vote with their co-ethnics is consequential for the success of an ethnic party since success requires ethnic vote consolidation. In Chapter 4, I will develop a theoretical argument that among other things explains this difference in ethnic solidarity while voting.

In addition, ethnic solidarity alone cannot explain ethnic party success. Even if voters are more willing to vote with co-ethnics in some states than others, this does not necessarily imply that they will choose their ethnic party over another party. The next chapter will also explain why marginalized voters are drawn to their ethnic party more in some states than others. Chapter Four will develop a framework in which ethnic party

performance is impacted by two factors – the level of ethnic solidarity and the value of the ethnic party to the marginalized voter.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Mobilizing Marginalized Citizens**

Olzak (1982: 355) defines ethnic mobilization as “the process by which groups organize around some feature of ethnic identity (for example, skin color, language, customs) in pursuit of collective ends.” However, groups can organize for multiple ends, at different times, and through distinct forms. For instance, socially-excluded groups mobilize to seek inclusion, while dominant or privileged groups may mobilize to exclude other groups. Moreover, marginalized groups mobilize only when they can overcome internal and external constraints against mobilization; they often mobilize later than other groups.

In this chapter, I begin by answering two related questions: (1) How is the mobilization of a marginalized ethnic group distinct from other groups? and (2) How do social movements impact the electoral prospects of political parties? The answers to these questions allow me to develop a framework to explain the performance of ethnic parties representing a marginalized ethnic group.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the objectives, constraints, and opportunities associated with the mobilization of a historically marginalized ethnic group. At the end of this section, I emphasize the analytical distinction between electoral mobilization through parties and social mobilization through movements as two separate forms of collective action.

This distinction foregrounds the discussion in the second section to explain how the historical movement of a marginalized ethnic group affects its electoral mobilization by multiethnic and ethnic parties. The third section is devoted to explaining ethnic party performance, why it succeeds in some cases but fails in others. The section argues that a historical movement of a marginalized group curtails its electoral mobilization by an ethnic party.

### *The Marginalized*

To comprehend fully how the marginalized mobilize to engage the democratic process it is essential to understand the influence of exclusion on the objectives of mobilization, the constraints exclusion poses, and the opportunity shifts required to overcome these constraints. But before discussing the effects of exclusion, I must first clarify the concept of exclusion.

#### *State-Sanctioned Exclusion and Socially-Practiced Exclusion*

The exclusion of an ethnic group can be the product of state or social design. It is therefore important to make a conceptual distinction between two types of exclusion: state-sanctioned exclusion and socially-practiced exclusion. In the first type, the state implements and enforces the process of marginalization and stigmatization by declaring a race or ethnicity as lowly, second-class, or dangerous and throwing its power behind the project of discrimination. As a result of this type of exclusion, the marginalized group suffers a loss of previously enjoyed rights. Such exclusion projects are not restricted to authoritarian regimes alone; they also appear in democracies. Examples of

this behavior include the stigmatization and systematic mass extermination of Jews in Nazi Germany, projects of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, the pogroms against ethnic minorities in the former Soviet Union, the exclusion of Blacks in the Jim Crow South, and the marginalization of Muslims by the current Hindu nationalist government in the Indian state of Gujarat. The key feature of this type of exclusion is that the state assumes the major role in the process of discrimination and stigmatization. While the state may be acting on extant social prejudice, it vastly exaggerates this prejudice to serve its interests.<sup>36</sup>

The second type of exclusion is socially designed and enforced. This type of exclusion is governed by principles with a social or religious basis. The state may condone these principles through indifference; alternately, the state may oppose them, but not fully succeed in eliminating the practices rooted in social prejudice. Since socially-practiced exclusion is rooted in social norms and practices, the excluded groups historically suffer a denial of rights. Moreover, even when the state invests these groups with rights, they still struggle to access them. Examples of socially-practiced exclusion include the race-based exclusion of Blacks in the United States, the marginalization of untouchables in India by the Hindu caste system, and discrimination against the Burakumin in Japan. In this dissertation, I explain an ethnic group's political response to socially-practiced exclusion via democratic institutions. But, what do the marginalized facing social exclusion mobilize for? The objectives of the mobilization of a marginalized group are shaped by its experience of exclusion and associated

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<sup>36</sup> I agree there is inherent tension in attributing agency to the state when state policies are formulated by a democratically elected government; society also bears some responsibility for supporting the state. Widely-published evidence nevertheless affirms the conclusion that the states in Nazi Germany and Gujarat were substantially responsible for engineering and enforcing policies against Jews and Muslims respectively.

disadvantages.

Historically, stigmatized ethnic groups have not participated in politics or been represented by members from their own communities. These groups have also been denied equal access to public spaces like restaurants, roads, swimming pools, libraries, schools, and colleges. They have faced restrictions on owning property, housing, working outside lowly professions, and marrying outside their race or ethnic group. They have been subjected to violence and humiliation. In democracies, when the state intervenes on these groups' behalf by outlawing segregation and discrimination, the practices of exclusion persist, albeit in hidden forms. This is not surprising, however, given that these practices do not originate in state policies, rather they are socially derived. Stigma is assigned to a group from the outside, and it is rarely possible for members belonging to a stigmatized group to exit it. This identity trap has profound implications for a member belonging to a stigmatized ethnic group.

For instance, Charles Taylor (1994: 25) voices concerns about the damage that stigma – or, as he refers to it, “misrecognition” – can cause. He writes, “Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.” Taylor continues, “Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” Taylor draws our attention to the distortions in self-evaluation among stigmatized individuals. Psychological theories of stereotype threat illustrate one instance of the damage resulting from distorted self-worth. They argue members of

certain minority groups are prone to underperform academically because of an unconscious fear of living up to negative stereotypes about their group's intellectual capacity (Steele 1998). Stereotype threat is a possibility whenever a person is at risk of fulfilling a negative stereotype associated with his or her group.

Recent work in economics demonstrates another aspect of stigma-related damage. It highlights how stigma undermines the economic prospects of marginalized groups. Economists argue that social exclusion worsens the odds for breaking out of poverty. As markets remain susceptible to capture by powerful groups, they can become biased towards socially dominant groups because of those groups' stronger community resource networks (Basu 2006; Banerjee and Munshi 2004). Empirical studies show identity-related stigma acts as a barrier to entering the market. Members of stigmatized groups are denied jobs (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003) and credit. Still other studies point out that members of stigmatized groups are undersupplied with education through state policy (Weiner 1990) and denied access by others (Dreze and Gazdar 1997). As the quality of these groups' human capital is constrained, the stigma persists albeit on a different basis.<sup>37</sup>

Since exclusion is a product of social design as opposed to some natural order, its termination requires that the discriminating design and its underlying principles be called into question. Consequently, when the opportunity to mobilize appears, group mobilization among the marginalized is motivated by the need to both end exclusion and gain recognition. In this respect, democratic politics holds the possibility for marginalized citizens to mobilize and prompt the state to address the disadvantages

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<sup>37</sup> A group which was historically excluded on the basis of religion, race or ethnicity is restigmatized because of its perceived inability to catch up with the rest of the society despite legal equality.

rooted in their lower social status. However, marginalization and related disadvantages constrain the ability of the marginalized group to mobilize.

Members of a marginalized group face a specific set of external and internal constraints against their mobilization. While on the one hand, structural domination poses a fundamental challenge, on the other, the group also faces internal resource constraints. Structural subordination, that is when the marginalized ethnic group is under the political, economic, and social control of another group, prevents marginalized groups from either self-mobilizing or being fully mobilized by outside organizations. These relations of subordination imply the threat of coercion from the dominant group if the subordinate group challenges the relationship.

Mobilization is also constrained by an excluded group's lack of internal capacity. Ethnic mobilization requires leadership and organizational, material, and cultural resources (Olzak 1983; McAdam 1982; Jenkins 1983; Barany 2002). The literature in ethnic politics often assumes that a reservoir of resources already exists which an ethnic group can use for its political mobilization. While this may be true for many ethnic groups, such resources may not exist for a marginalized group; even if they do exist, these resources may not be easily deployed. By definition, a group described as marginalized is either entirely without an elite class (Horowitz 1986) or possesses only a small organizing class proportionate to its population.

Furthermore, in addition to material resources, a marginalized group is also without cultural resources. While its exclusion is mirrored in mainstream historical accounts, the group's own histories are often unrecorded and its myths and symbols are locally recognized and do not have universal recognition even within the group. This

cultural material is important to the process of mobilization.<sup>38</sup> The existence of universally acknowledged symbols that exert a force on the group can be used to coordinate group action (Laitin 1986; Johnson 2001; Ross 2007). Unless the above mentioned constraints weaken or disappear, the possibility of mobilization is ruled out.

### *Opportunity Shifts*

To mobilize successfully, a marginalized group must be exposed to opportunities that enable it to overcome these external as well as internal constraints. A variety of exogenous changes can trigger opportunity shifts. These allow the closing of the power gap between the marginalized group and other groups in society. A sudden decline in the fortune of the dominant group in the wake of economic or political crises or state intervention, for instance in the form of limits on size of ownership of landholdings, influences the control members of the dominant group are able to exercise over the subordinate group. Alternatively, the relationship of interdependence between the two groups could weaken. For example, the mechanization of agriculture across many developing societies made the role of the members of the subordinate groups redundant, diminishing their value to the dominant groups and therefore making their active control unnecessary (Scott 1986). The marginalized could also migrate out of such social relations. In the United States, for example, African American mobilization is linked to migration from the rural South to cities in the North (Piven and Cloward 1977). Although this migration did not end the social exclusion of African Americans, it

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<sup>38</sup> While I agree with the argument that it is the process of mobilization that breathes meaning into symbols (Chandra 2006), such an argument presumes the prior existence of universally recognized cultural materials that can later be invested with meaning. A historically marginalized group often lacks even such basic building blocks.

created the conditions for their mobilization by removing them from the environment of everyday domination in the American South. It also turned African Americans into a constituency for the Democratic Party.

Increasing rural-urban migration over the past three decades has produced similar opportunities for Dalits in India.<sup>39</sup> Structural domination will stifle any mobilization, be it electoral or social. Yet, the weakening of external constraints does not guarantee mobilization, the marginalized group must overcome internal constraints for that to happen. Indeed, often the weakening of structural or external domination is accelerated by the development of internal capacity within the marginalized group.

The opportunity shift most likely to enhance the internal capacity of a group involves access to education and economic resources which assist in building organizational capacity within the group and enable its mobilization. Sometimes the acquisition of these resources takes place as a result of affirmative action policies the state has already put in place for the marginalized group. This educated class then goes on to provide the group its organizers and mobilization leaders. For example, Pai (2002) and Chandra (2004) have argued the appearance of Dalit parties in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh corresponds with the rise in the number of literate Dalits. These findings resemble the account of Black mobilization, which also gained momentum as mobilization resources rose within the community (Morris 1984).

State-initiated policies like land redistribution and recruitment in sectors that may have been previously closed to the subordinate group, for example, the military,

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<sup>39</sup> In fact, B.R. Ambedkar had asked Dalits to leave their villages for urban areas as far back as the nineteen thirties. In his view urban areas presented more opportunities to escape control of the dominant castes and the stigma of untouchability. As it turns out, even as rural-urban migration has expanded with increasing economic growth in urban India, Dalits have migrated out of rural areas in smaller numbers as compared to members of other groups.

also contribute towards empowering the group. Other institutional opportunities such as affirmative action policies in the legislatures and government employment, and decentralization of power to the level where the marginalized groups are in a larger concentration also act as the means for generating leadership resources within the group. For example, Van Cott (2005) argues mobilization of the indigenous people in Latin America has been spurred by an institutional change. Decentralization has resulted in the appearance of a group of organizers and leaders from within the indigenous community. These opportunity shifts enhance the capacity of a marginalized group to mobilize. The four cells in Table 4.1 illustrate the mobilization outcomes associated with the set of external and internal constraints. Unless a marginalized group can overcome both types of constraints it will not be able to mobilize. So, in Table 4.1, except for the lower right cell, conditions in the other three cells are not conducive for group mobilization. Under the conditions of external and internal constraints, the upper left cell, no mobilization is possible. The group can either be denied the use of franchise, or mobilized indirectly by intermediaries belonging to the dominant group. Even when the external constraints weaken (lower left cell), the persistence of internal constraints prevents group mobilization. However, the group can be directly mobilized by parties. The situation depicted in the upper right cell, in which internal constraints weaken while external ones still persist is only a theoretical possibility.

**Table 4.1 Internal and External Constraints against Group Mobilization**

	<b>Internal Constraints Present</b>	<b>Internal Constraints Absent</b>
<b><i>External Constraints Present</i></b>	No mobilization	No mobilization
<b><i>External Constraints Absent</i></b>	No mobilization	<b>**Mobilization**</b>

Opportunity shifts permitting, social exclusion can actually assist the mobilization of a marginalized group by becoming a cause around which members of the group come together. Unlike the mobilization of other ethnic groups, the mobilization of a marginalized ethnic group need not be sustained by constant reframing of issues to ensure their salience. Rather, the day-to-day experience of social indignity and exclusion provides a ready context for the framing of issues (Gamson 1992). Moreover, participation in costly collective action among members of these groups, while remaining strategic,<sup>40</sup> is not contingent on materially-based instrumentalist returns. For instance, in her discussion of the microfoundations for costly insurgent collective action in El Salvador, Elizabeth Wood (2005) argues the participating peasantry was motivated by nonmaterial returns. Peasants participated in or supported the insurgency despite a threat of violence for three reasons: to participate in an activity of social value, to defy their oppressors, and to acquire agency. In other words, actor preferences were shaped by the experience of marginalization.

When group mobilization actually occurs, it can take two distinct forms. It can occur as social mobilization in the civic space and take the form of a movement. It can also occur in the electoral arena and take the form of an ethnic party. I define social mobilization as the ability of members of a marginalized group to come together in the quotidian space to demand social equality and equal access to public resources. Social mobilization is directed both towards the society as well as the state. Electoral mobilization, on the other hand, is restricted to activities of participation in elections.

It is worth noting that while the above mentioned opportunity shifts enable mobilization through a movement, an ethnic party requires an additional opportunity

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<sup>40</sup> By “strategic” I mean that such actions are sensitive to opportunity.

shift for success; the electoral opportunity structure should allow for the success of small parties, which is what an emerging ethnic party (representing an ethnic minority) is. Typically a proportional representation (PR) electoral system provides such opportunity. Conversely, in a single member district plurality (SMDP) system such opportunities are not available, unless coalition governance has become common practice because of party system fragmentation, making it easier for small parties to be successful. We should typically expect a strong movement to boost the electoral success of an ethnic party when electoral opportunity appears. Similarly, at the moment of opportunity, we should expect ethnic party's performance to be weaker where the ethnic movement is absent. The next section will examine these two expectations in the light of the effects movements have on the electoral mobilization of a marginalized group by multiethnic as well as ethnic parties. It will show that contrary to these expectations, historical movements can curtail the success of an ethnic party.

### ***Movements and Parties***

Traditionally, scholars have regarded social movements as modes of challenge and protest (Gamson 1990). Others have suggested that movements are potential rivals to the system of political representation (Jenkins and Klendrmans 1997). According to these views, the activities of social movements lay outside institutions while the actual levers of power lay within (Tilly 1978). However, these narrow interpretations of the role of movements have been widely contested. An alternate view of movements has argued they shape the working of what we understand to be the formal institutional space of politics, which comprises political parties, elections, legislatures, and the

judiciary (Burststein 1998; Tarrow 1998). Mary Fainsod Katzenstein (1997) has gone so far as to call social movements “extra-institutional.” Indeed, these movement scholars argue that institutions do not operate in a vacuum; their behavior is often shaped by social forces that surround them. Most notably, recent work by Van Cott (2005) and Goldstone (2003) has highlighted the importance of movement activity for political parties.

### *What Do Movements Accomplish?*

The social and ethnic movements of a marginalized group produce three effects: voice, facilitative, and coordinative effects. These alter the electoral mobilization of a group. To begin with, movements expand group consciousness. They frame latent demands for social equality and create symbols to exert force on the entire ethnic group. In short, they represent the collective strength of the group. By organizing the group, they announce its agency to the rest of society including political parties. By defining and giving voice to the marginalized group’s grievances, they alter the behavior of parties towards the group. Parties relying on the support of the group then have to respond to the mobilization.

Movements of marginalized groups also lay the groundwork for future mobilization in multiple arenas. In this sense, over time, movements create facilitative effects (McAdam 1982). A movement reduces the power imbalance between an insurgent marginalized group and its opponents, thereby improving the probability for successful social protests in the future. Additionally, it makes the repression of the marginalized group more expensive, and thus improves its bargaining position with

respect to both other groups and the state (Wood 2003). Over time, these changes accumulate to undermine the norms of exclusion and hierarchy, thereby easing the social resistance to the marginalized group's inclusion and integration. This is not to say that in the immediate short run a movement will not provoke countermobilization by dominant groups. It can also provoke state repression. In this sense, the process of mobilization is dynamic (McAdam 1982). Yet, the two measures are difficult to sustain over time under democratic conditions. Under conditions of competitive electoral politics, supporting the repression of an electorally relevant group can alienate the group from the political party that is associated with the repression; an expensive outcome for a party in a fragmenting party system. Besides, if the protest of the insurgent group is peaceful, other state institutions like courts and civil society organizations can step in on the side of the group.

The leaders and events associated with this mobilization hold immense symbolic value for the group. These symbols, because of their significance to the members of the group, assist in coordinating their actions (Johnson 2002; Ross 2007). Once established in the public sphere, these symbols are readily available for political parties to incorporate when they want to mobilize a marginalized group.

### *Marginalized Citizens and Political Parties*

Parties are regarded as intermediaries between states and their citizens. But how do parties mobilize a marginalized group that typically lacks voice? There exists an underlying assumption in the literature on catchall and multiethnic parties that those parties that mobilize multiple groups in a polity mobilize all of them equally. However,

in a ranked or hierarchical system, parties do not always have to mobilize a group directly to gain its support; parties do not necessarily mobilize marginalized groups. Where the marginalized group is in a relationship of subordination to a dominant group that exercises control over it, a party can obtain a marginalized group's votes through members of dominant groups who act as intermediaries. In such a case, the party has no incentive to mobilize members of this group directly; without the possibility of exit, loyalty can be taken for granted (Hirschman 1970). Where members of a marginalized group are no longer under the control of a dominant group, but still lack the capacity to mobilize, the party can directly mobilize the group. Nevertheless, the party does not have to acknowledge the entire set of issues salient to the marginalized group; it can neglect the issue of exclusion that is most salient to the group. I classify this as a case of undermobilization.

Only when the marginalized group can overcome the internal and external constraints to mobilize through a movement (as is the case in the lower right cell of Table 4.1), raise ethnic consciousness, and voice its exclusion-related grievances, is it fully mobilized by the political party. Since the party relies on the group's electoral support, it has to alter its relationship with the group. The mobilization must acknowledge its demands otherwise the party runs the risk of losing the group's support. The party thus uses inclusive mobilization strategies. Group mobilization also signals to other parties the group's independence from the control of the dominant group. This opens the possibility of other parties seeking the support of a group to mobilize it. Hence, multiethnic parties are only compelled to mobilize marginalized groups fully when the members of those groups are free to vote and have been able to

mobilize socially. In the absence of these two prerequisites, members of a marginalized group are either not mobilized or are undermobilized by a multiethnic party. Table 4.2 illustrates the three possible mobilization outcomes. It must be stressed that this process of inclusion does not occur over one election, rather it is gradual and the change is generational, occurring over the medium run.<sup>41</sup> This proposition that whether or not a marginalized group is able to self-mobilize impacts how it is mobilized by a party is consequential. It has implications for the electoral prospects of an ethnic party.

**Table 4.2 A Marginalized Group’s Social Mobilization and its Electoral Mobilization by a Political Party**

<b>Constraints facing the Marginalized group</b>	<b>Mobilization Outcome</b>	<b>Multiethnic Party Response</b>
External and Internal constraints exist. State of subordination	No group mobilization is possible..	Party does not mobilize the group. It obtains electoral support of the marginalized group through members of controlling or dominant group.
External constraints weaken, Internal constraints persist.	No group mobilization	Party mobilizes the group but neglects the issue of social exclusion. Party undermobilizes the group.
External and Internal constraints weaken.	Group mobilization is possible	Party fully mobilizes the group by being attentive to the issue of ethnic inclusion.

### *Explaining Ethnic Party Performance*

In a multiethnic society, the success of ethnic parties also means the failure of multiethnic parties and vice versa. The presence or absence of prior group mobilization of a marginalized group results in the emergence of two types of multiethnic mobilization in a hierarchical society. I draw a conceptual distinction between these, inclusive multiethnic mobilization and exclusive multiethnic mobilization.

<sup>41</sup> Chandra points towards the problems of inclusion of the elite belonging to a newly mobilized group in a centralized non democratic party. However, in a competitive electoral system, over time centralized parties are able to adapt and include the ethnic elite.

### *Inclusive Multiethnic Mobilization*

When a social movement paves the path for the social and political inclusion of a marginalized group, a multiethnic party is able to make cross-group appeals more successfully. The effects of a movement enable the members of the marginalized group to access alternate political identities; members of the group then begin to support different political parties. As a result, ethnic solidarity diminishes in electoral politics even as ethnic consciousness among ethnic groups remains high.<sup>42</sup>

### *Exclusive Ethnic Mobilization*

The absence of a movement allows the norms of hierarchy to persist. The marginalized group continues to be excluded. As explained above, under such conditions, the marginalized group is undermobilized. The marginalized voters lack access to multiple political identities. Given the emphasis on separation in society, the multiethnic party has to mobilize groups separately. Repeated electoral mobilization of the marginalized group caught in an identity trap sustains high levels of ethnic solidarity and reinforces ethnicity as the primary form of electoral organization.<sup>43</sup>

Multiethnic mobilization is likely to sustain low levels of ethnic solidarity among ethnic voters, making it more difficult for an ethnic party to consolidate the ethnic vote. On the other hand, when exclusive multiethnic mobilization has been the

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<sup>42</sup> I borrow this insight from Benedict Anderson (1983) on nationalist mobilization and apply it to political identity. According to Anderson dismantling of social hierarchy is a necessary prerequisite for the top-down or elite-mass spread of national identity. However, in the case of political identities, dismantling of hierarchy can also have another effect. Instead of consolidating identities, it can result in identity proliferation. Social equality can open the door for an excluded group to not one particular political identity, but to multiple identities.

<sup>43</sup> Such a multiethnic party is an electoral alliance of ethnic groups, and therefore it remains vulnerable to defection of these ethnic groups. In ranked societies, when the ethnic groups supporting the party are in a hierarchical relationship, the alliance is likely to be asymmetric, and the marginalized group is likely to draw the least benefits from it.

predominant form of electoral mobilization, high levels of ethnic solidarity are sustained among ethnic voters. In this instance, at the point of party system fragmentation, an ethnic party will be more successful at consolidating the ethnic vote. However, a high level of ethnic solidarity is only the necessary condition for ethnic party success. After all, the consolidated ethnic vote can as easily move to another multiethnic party. This brings us to the next question: Why is an ethnic party preferred by members of a marginalized ethnic group over other political parties?

Historically, where a marginalized group is able to mobilize, norms of social hierarchy and social exclusion have begun to weaken. The group develops multiple forms of representation in the public sphere. These changes impact the group's electoral mobilization. Parties seeking its electoral support oppose the principle of exclusion and adopt group symbols in their mobilization strategies. Parties are also able to widen their networks among the marginalized group. This reduces the grievance rooted in ethnic exclusion that an ethnic party requires for its success.

By contrast, historically, when a marginalized group is prevented from socially mobilizing because of external and internal constraints, multiethnic parties have no incentive to acknowledge the identity-related grievances of the marginalized group. Its electoral mobilization neglects the issue of social exclusion. Given the undermobilization of the group, the issue of ethnic exclusion remains salient in electoral politics. Social exclusion of the marginalized group and norms of hierarchy are widely observed in society. Additionally, members of the marginalized group are underrepresented in the rank and file of parties. Consequently, in this case, an ethnic party's appeal possesses high salience when the party begins to compete during the

period of party system fragmentation. The party turns into a focal point of the ethnic group's aspirations.

*Movements, Parties, and the Marginalized Voter*

While marginalized voters interpret the decision to vote based on where they stand in relation to the state and the rest of the society, the decision of choosing a party is influenced by perceptions of that party. Whether the party opposes social hierarchy and recognizes the marginalized as social equals informs this perception. In Chapter 2, I have already discussed how the experience of marginalization shapes the motivation to vote on election day. In the following discussion, I argue the absence or presence of historical movements shapes how marginalized voters come to perceive political parties.

The scholarship on voter-party linkages provides the microfoundations for theories on party systems and party success and explains what connects voters to parties. According to Horowitz (1985), voters support an ethnic party in order to improve their access to material goods (mainly through improved access to the state) and enhance their self-esteem by enhancing the status of their ethnic group. Essentially, this approach describes an exchange relationship between the party and the voter by combining the materialist approach towards ethnicity (Bates 1974; Breton 1964; Hardin 1995) with the self-esteem-based social-psychological approach (Tajfel 1970) towards ethnic mobilization. In her work on India, Chandra (2004) suggests that voters turn to their ethnic party in search of patronage and psychic goods.

This is a useful framework for understanding citizens' aspirations related to

voting. It is not clear, however, how the two sides of the exchange relationship are squared while explaining the votes of members of a marginalized group. That is to say, do marginalized citizens deliver their votes in exchange for material gains, self-esteem, or both? This question is especially pertinent in the light of two issues. First, given their lower social and economic status, material gains either do not accrue, or do so only on an ad hoc basis to the marginalized in exchange for participation. But we know from the discussion in Chapter 2 that the marginalized do participate in elections. Moreover, we also know from findings on the marginalized in contexts outside electoral politics that the marginalized participate even without the promise of material returns (Wood, 2003).

This brings us to the second issue which relates to the distinctness of the self-esteem-based needs of a marginalized group. Experimental research on the psychological foundations of identity has pointed out that social identification with a group may actually be increased when the group is threatened or stigmatized. For example, Turner et al (1984) reported that in-group defeat produces even higher levels of in-group preference than does success among committed group members. So, in order to understand party preferences for the marginalized voter, greater emphasis must be paid to the psychological benefits. Because for marginalized voters, as has been argued in Chapter 2, the promise of resource transfers along personal clientelistic ties is often not backed by enforcement mechanisms, and is, thus, discounted. In real terms, the guarantee of material benefits does not exist for a vast majority of the marginalized since relative to other members of the society they lack the means of holding their elected representatives to their promises. Standard patron-client models do not account for such an eventuality. They assume that all clients possess an equal capacity to hold

patrons accountable, however, the experience of socially and economically marginalized citizens presents a challenge to this assumption.

How a political party gets represented or what it gets identified with has bearing on how voters perceive it in the election booth. Voters focus on party symbols, statements by party leadership, and issues raised during the election campaign. Voters interpret these representations of the party according to their biases when forming their views of it. These biases are grounded in their day-to-day experiences.

A marginalized group's social mobilization undermines the social hierarchy in the public sphere and creates alternate forms of ethnic representation outside the electoral arena. Social mobilization induces a change within the group that involves the rejection of social hierarchy. Group assertion occurs, not only in the political sphere, but also, in the cultural sphere. Since these cultural symbols also represent the group's grievances and aspirations, they command a following among its members.

As discussed above, parties have to respond to group mobilization using inclusive strategies that recognize the group. Parties therefore appropriate these symbols. Consequently, in the electoral arena, the intensity of self esteem-based psychological needs is reduced for marginalized voters; these benefits already accrue from multiple sources. Furthermore, once accustomed to inclusive mobilization strategies that recognize them, marginalized voters are less responsive to appeals from ethnic parties. As a result, they are less likely to select parties on the basis of ethnic considerations.

Conversely, self esteem-related benefits from supporting ethnic parties will be high in the absence of movements. Among marginalized voters, the desire for social

recognition as equals and the removal of stigma overwhelmingly define their psychological needs. Typically, in such a case, marginalized voters, when mobilized by their ethnic party will support it for reasons of respect and dignity of their collective identity. In this case, absent alternate representations of group assertion, the ethnic party represents a rare public embodiment of group identity in the society. As a result, marginalized voters respond positively to ethnic party's mobilization even without guarantees that material benefits will be exchanged for voters' support. All in all, the historical experience of indignities, the strong sense of exclusion, and the lack of public recognition of their identity means that the mobilization of an ethnic party on the issue of inclusion resonates with marginalized voters.

By impacting the norms of exclusion, a movement gradually alters voter perceptions in another way. In those societies where the norms of exclusion have weakened, the state is not viewed by voters as the exclusive preserve of a particular ethnic group. Elections therefore do not turn into zero-sum contests between ethnic groups, with the victory of a particular party implying the defeat of another ethnic group. By contrast, in nonmovement societies where norms of hierarchy and related exclusion remain strong, the state is vied by the dominant group as their preserve; this prompts the marginalized group to also adopt the strategy of capture of the state by supporting their ethnic party. In this instance, elections turn into zero-sum games between ethnic groups.

Ethnic party success requires high ethnic solidarity and high salience of the issue of exclusion. In this chapter, I have argued the success and failure of an ethnic party during the period of opportunity turns on the prior mobilization of an ethnic group. The

presence or absence of a movement demanding social equality impacts this mobilization. Movements pave the way for inclusive multiethnic politics and allow a marginalized group to access alternate political identities which lower overall ethnic solidarity.

In addition to making political parties more inclusive, social mobilization is also responsible for producing multiple representations of group identity and recognition in society. This reduces the salience of the issue of exclusion. Together, the two outcomes have an adverse impact on an ethnic party's electoral success. The absence of a movement encourages exclusive multiethnic mobilization. It also prevents a marginalized group from developing alternate political identities. These then sustain high ethnic solidarity. Without a movement, the issue of exclusion is preserved for the ethnic party to mobilize the ethnic voter successfully. High ethnic solidarity as well as high salience of the issue of exclusion favors ethnic party success.

## Chapter 5

### Comparing the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh With the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) in Tamil Nadu

Both Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are large and politically important states. Dalits constitute one fifth of the population in each of the two states. Across both the states Dalit-based parties compete in elections, yet their performances diverge. While the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Dalit-based party in Uttar Pradesh, has been successful in capturing the majority of the vote share of its ethnic group, the Dalit Panthers of India, the Dalit-based party in Tamil Nadu, has been unable to expand its vote share among Dalits in the state.

**Table 5.1 Population and Electoral district profile of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu**

	Population	Percentage of Dalits	No. of Parliamentary districts	Reserved for Dalits	No. of Assembly districts	Reserved for Dalits
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	166052859	21.1	80	17	403	90
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	62110839	19	39	7	234	42

Source: Census of India, Government of India 2001

#### *Dalit Party Performance in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu*

The decline of the traditionally strong parties, the Congress in Uttar Pradesh and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) (both multiethnic regional parties) in Tamil Nadu, has created political opportunities for smaller parties to be competitive.

Today, Dalit parties compete in elections in both states but with contrasting degrees of success. The effective number of political parties in Uttar Pradesh is 4.99. For Tamil Nadu, it is 4.84.<sup>44</sup>

In Uttar Pradesh, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has recorded higher success with an increasing number of electoral victories since 1984, and expanded its vote share in every subsequent election. Most importantly, before the 2007 state assembly elections, the BSP held the chief ministerial position on three occasions, albeit never for the full five year duration of the state assembly.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI), the most prominent Dalit party in Tamil Nadu, has failed thus far to emerge as an influential actor. Its vote share has not increased among the Dalit community and the party has not gained a cabinet position in any state government.<sup>46</sup>

Consider the electoral performance of the BSP since 1984, the year it first contested elections in Uttar Pradesh. Its tally of electoral victories in the national elections went from 1 in 1991 to 6 in 1996, to 14 in 1999 to 19 in 2004. Its success was far more impressive in the state assembly elections where its tally increased from 13 in 1989 to 67 in 1993, and to 98 in 2002. Although the BSP's vote share among other communities has gradually increased, its electoral success has been built largely on the support that BSP has been able to garner among the Dalit community. According to survey data gathered after the 1996 and the 2004 national elections, 63.8 percent and 68

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<sup>44</sup> Cited in Wilkinson 2004: 156. ENPV was calculated based on parties operating from February – April 2002.

<sup>45</sup> It has held this position not on its own strength, but as a part of a ruling coalition, which has collapsed each time before the expiration of the tenure of the state assembly. Mayawati, the president of the BSP, herself a Dalit, has held the chief minister's position.

<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to accurately assess the strength of a political party when it competes in elections as a part of a coalition. In such cases the allotment of the number of electoral districts, the number of secure electoral districts in the pre-election arrangement with the coalition partners, and the number of cabinet positions can be used to assess the strength of the political party.

percent of Dalits respectively voted for the BSP. All together, 50.5 percent of Dalits identified themselves as traditional supporters of the party (Indian National Election Study 1996; 2004). High levels of support within the ethnic community allowed the BSP to enter into advantageous pre-election alliances during the state assembly elections in 1993 and 1996 and establish itself as a major party in the state.<sup>47</sup>

The BSP's hold over the Dalit vote has made it attractive to political entrepreneurs belonging to other ethnic groups – a prerequisite for electoral success. The above is in sharp contrast to the performance of the Dalit party in Tamil Nadu. Until now, the DPI has not been able to win an election to the national parliament. In the 2006 state assembly elections, it recorded its highest success when it won 4 electoral districts out of 234 total.<sup>48</sup> According to survey evidence gathered after the parliamentary elections in 2004 and the state assembly elections in 2006, 60 percent of Dalits identified themselves as traditional party supporters of one of the two main multiethnic parties, the DMK and the AIDMK. Only 4 percent said they were traditional supporters of the DPI. A noteworthy fact is that even as the Dalit party has failed to attract the ethnic group to its fold, the Desiya Murpoku Dravida Kazhagam (National Progressive Dravida Party), or DMDK, a new multiethnic party which was launched as recently as the 2006 state assembly elections, was able to garner an 8.6 percent vote share among Dalits. The inability of the DPI to consolidate its vote share within the Dalit community has considerably weakened its position in pre-election

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<sup>47</sup> In 1993 BSP was in an alliance with the Samajwadi Party, the ethnic party of the intermediate castes. In 1996 it was in alliance with Congress, the only other party with a significant Dalit support. In both instances BSP improved on its previous vote share establishing itself as a major political party in the state.

<sup>48</sup> The state of Uttar Pradesh elects 80 members to the national parliament and 403 to its state assembly. Similarly, the state of Tamil Nadu elects 32 members to the national parliament and 234 to the state assembly.

alliances. Only once has the party contested a parliamentary electoral district. It has only contested state assembly elections in eight districts. While the DPI has not been able to draw a large Dalit vote, other new parties have been relatively more successful in mobilizing support among Dalits.

Why has the BSP been able to demonstrate spectacular electoral success while the DPI has not performed similarly? Dalits who were traditional supporters of the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh from 1950 onward gradually shifted their support in large numbers towards the BSP beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the same time, other multiethnic parties in Uttar Pradesh failed to attract Dalits. Dalit support for the BSP remained strong over five state assembly and parliamentary elections even though prior to 2007 the BSP was in power in the state only for a total of 27 months in the seventeen years since it first captured an electoral district in the state. What is more, the party has never been a part of a national coalition government.<sup>49</sup> Comparatively, in a fragmenting party system, Dalit support has not shifted to a Dalit party in Tamil Nadu. The emerging multiethnic parties have been more successful at mobilizing the Dalit vote as compared to the Dalit party.

### ***Comparing Ethnic Solidarity between Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu***

The disaggregation of the electoral data gathered after the 2004 national election reveals there is a decisive variation among Dalits on the issue of ethnic voting in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In 2004 in Uttar Pradesh, 55.6 percent of Dalits responded that one should vote in the same way as one's own caste and community. By contrast,

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<sup>49</sup> The question is especially pertinent since it relates to a group which is largely poor, hence dependent on the state, and should be expected to be strategic about supporting winning coalitions.

37 percent of Dalits responded similarly in Tamil Nadu (See Table 5.2). This gap between the Dalit respondents from the two states stays roughly similar for the Dalits in the 18- 25 age group.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, during interviews when respondents were asked who should be their state's chief minister, 67 percent of Dalits selected Mayawati, the BSP president. In Tamil Nadu, only 14 percent selected Thirumavalavan, the president of the DPI. During interviews, Dalit voters were asked whether caste was an important consideration while choosing parties. In Tamil Nadu 11 percent said yes, while in Uttar Pradesh 46 percent responded similarly. Taken together, the survey and interview evidence point towards a difference in voter attitudes on ethnic solidarity, the value of ethnic parties, and the value of ethnicity while selecting parties in the two states.

This chapter traces the processes of Dalit mobilization across the two states. It will explain: (1) The difference in attitudes on ethnic solidarity; and (2) the difference in the value of the ethnic party to the Dalit voter. It will begin by comparing the historical mobilization of Dalits across the two states. Next, it will show how prior mobilization produces different types of multiethnic politics in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with very different consequences for the electoral prospects of an ethnic party.

**Table 5.2 Percentage of Dalits who agreed: 'One should vote in the same way as one's caste'**

States\Ethnic Solidarity	All age groups	18-25 yrs
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	56	56.8
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	37	33.3

Source: Indian National Election Study (INES). For 2004, Tamil Nadu=166 and Uttar Pradesh N=404.

### ***Overview of Movements in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu***

Lower caste mobilization began late in the state of Uttar Pradesh. It was led by

<sup>50</sup>These voters have come of age during the period of party system fragmentation and exposed to heightened efforts at ethnic mobilization.

an emergent middle class of Dalits in industrial centers of the state in the nineteen thirties and forties. Dalits were particularly prominent in the leather industry. (Their traditional occupation involved working with animal hides, an activity which is regarded as polluting among caste Hindus.). The Dalit movements that appeared remained confined to select urban pockets, though (Lynch 1968; Pai 1999; Gooptu 2004). Rural penetration of these movements was prevented by the control exercised over Dalits in rural Uttar Pradesh. In areas of the landlord-based land settlement system, self assertion of Dalits was made impossible by the power exercised over them by the landed class and the complete dependence of Dalits on the landlords. In fact, until the appearance of the Dalit ethnic party, extensive statewide mobilization of Dalits from within the group had not occurred in many parts of rural Uttar Pradesh. Not that group mobilization from outside had not been attempted.

During the period of the Indian freedom movement, untouchable uplift was a part of the Congress party's agenda. It was an issue Gandhi came to be very closely identified with. His efforts sent Congress party workers into Dalit localities for the first time (Pandey 2003). In order to replace their derogatory caste names, he gave the untouchables a new name calling them *Harijans*, meaning "God's children." Nevertheless, Gandhi's efforts and ideas failed to get broadcast in to rural Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, the activism directed at including untouchables into the national mainstream weakened after Gandhi's death in 1948 and the term Harijan came to be regarded as patronizing by Dalits.

Another attempt at inclusion of Dalits in Uttar Pradesh was made by Hindu reform movements. With the introduction of census enumeration of caste and religious

communities in the early twentieth century, Hindu organizations had become conscious of the relative size of their community. Fearful of losing the substantial number of untouchables to the Muslim and Christian communities through conversion, they focused on bringing untouchables more firmly into the Hindu fold. Different reform movements appeared across North India. These efforts were the predecessors to the Hindu nationalist movement. Today, Hindu nationalists work towards transforming the Hindu identity, which is essentially a religious identity, into a political identity. To achieve this aim, they are committed to absorbing Dalits among the existing fold of upper-caste and intermediate caste members. The movement has tried to do this through organizations like Sewa Bharti which runs schools in Dalit localities, holds indoctrination camps, and performs ceremonies of ritual purification (Jaffrelot 2003). Yet, so far, these efforts have met with limited success.

A prime reason for this outcome has been that the community was urged to adopt the behavior of the upper castes to attain higher social acceptance. Greater cleanliness and abstinence from the consumption of meat and alcohol were encouraged. Meanwhile, these self-purification measures did not focus on changing the social mindset of caste discrimination among the rest of society. Even after being ritually included into the Hindu fold, the treatment of Dalits by other members of the Hindu society did not undergo any significant change. For the most part, the society in Uttar Pradesh remained conservative. In fact, such inclusion based on the ceremony of purification only reinforced the principle of purity and pollution inherent in the caste system.

Another movement to sweep Uttar Pradesh was the farmer's movement during the nineteen seventies and eighties. This, for the most part, was led by members belonging to intermediate castes. These people demanded higher procurement prices, greater fertilizer subsidies, free power, and loan waivers from the state (Varshney 2001). The economic focus of these demands notwithstanding, ethnicity was deeply implicated in the success of the organizing of farmers (Gupta 1997). It involved the participation of the intermediate castes, who were the chief beneficiaries of the limited land reforms as they had moved from tenant farmers to landowners. Yet, the farmer movements did not go beyond making economic demands. They did not attack the principle of social hierarchy or denounce the hegemony of the upper castes. These movements were also fairly antagonistic to the needs of Dalits. The intermediate castes and Dalits were divided by both identity as well as economic interests. Not only are Dalits ranked lower, but they are also largely landless or marginal workers possessing different economic interests. The polity in Uttar Pradesh has undergone social churning taking different forms and impacting different groups. However, until the appearance of their ethnic party the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh were not included in any mass mobilization.

### ***Dalit Mobilization in Tamil Nadu***

Historically, untouchability was observed in more severe forms in the state of Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh. Here, in some parts of the state, not only physical contact but also the shadow of untouchables was regarded as polluting. Although the practice of untouchability still survives in virulent forms, its incidence has substantially

declined. This has not been an outcome of legal provisions alone, but also, resistance from Dalits. Prior to independence from British colonial rule in 1947 the state witnessed many social movements among the low castes in this region. The untouchable groups began to mobilize as early as the latter half of the nineteenth century under the influence of Christian missionaries. Given the extent of the exclusion of untouchables, missionaries were initially drawn to them in search of converts. But over time, their engagement with the community became much deeper. They were heavily involved in spreading literacy among Dalits at a time when the community was barred from attending schools. Later Christian missionaries got involved in advocating for the rights of Dalits. They were the first to introduce untouchables to Orientalist ideas that described Brahmins as the Aryan conquerors who had subjugated the natives through the caste system. Looked at this way, Brahmins were outsiders ruling over the racially distinct race of Dravidas. Since the untouchables were at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, they represented the 'original inhabitants' of the land. They thus began to refer to themselves as the *Adi-Dravidas*. At the same time, other lower caste groups including the Nadars and Vaniyars (situated just above untouchables in the caste hierarchy) also mobilized aggressively. Their primary aim was to attain higher status in the caste enumeration carried out by the colonial state (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967; Hardgrave 1969; Dirks 2001).

The process of self organization involved the creation of origin myths, group symbols, and cultural icons. Under the influence of untouchable leaders such as M.C. Raja, the caste organization representing this group demanded the replacement of traditional caste names such as Paraiyan and Panchamas, now regarded as derogatory,

with the more acceptable Adi-Dravidas. They also demanded higher membership in the governing councils and the state administration. In mid-1920s, E.V. Ramaswami Naikar or “Periyar” as he was more popularly known launched the self-respect movement that had a lasting impact on politics in the state. He first made his name in the agitation demanding temple entry for untouchables. A self-proclaimed atheist, Periyar spent a substantial part of his life attacking Hindu religion, its rituals, and its hierarchical organization. He argued for social inclusion of Adi-Dravidas, encouraged intercaste marriages, and denounced the practice of untouchability. He also advocated for the removal of income inequality calling it a prerequisite for self-respect and dignity. Already alive to the ideas of self-authorship for the purpose of status uplift, both untouchable and intermediate castes were drawn to the self-respect movement in large numbers.

Unlike in Uttar Pradesh, the movement was able to spread into rural Tamil Nadu because of a cultivator-based land settlement system. While Dalits were poor and landless under this system, they were less dependent on the landlords as compared to Uttar Pradesh. This gave outside agents (political and social activists) more access to Dalits. The adoption of the demand for social equality meant that Dalits also gained access to other movements. They participated in the Tamil nationalist movement (Pandian 2007) and peasant movements.

Two aspects stand out in the comparison of the historical trajectory of movements in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In Uttar Pradesh, Dalit mobilization remained confined to urban pockets where a very small fraction of Dalits resided. The mobilization was not based on the rejection of the caste system. In Uttar Pradesh, the

notion of hierarchy or separation was accepted among Hindu reformers. In Tamil Nadu, Dalit mobilization was able to percolate into rural areas. But more importantly, Dalit mobilization was centered on the rejection of the caste system.

Next, I turn to two specific indicators to assess the social impact of the absence and presence of movements. The caste system reproduces itself through the practice of endogamy, or intra-group marriage. Social reformers opposed to the caste system attacked this practice. Given that to begin with all four societies were deeply tradition bound with strong norms on separation, comparing the social attitudes on intercaste marriage allows me to check for the social impact of the historic movements.

Another feature of these movements was the rejection of Hindu religion and the encouragement for religious conversion. Both Periyar and Ambedkar not only rejected the caste system, but also the Hindu faith. While Periyar became an atheist, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism. Such attacks on Hinduism politicized conversion. Over time, religious conversion has become even more controversial. The issue has become so charged that in the past decade, some state governments, primarily the ones controlled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, have banned religious conversion. Dalits, on their part, have continued to use conversion to protest their discrimination. They have converted to Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam en masse. I also compare the social attitudes towards religious conversion between the four states to demonstrate the impact of movements.

The impact of these movements is visible in the variation in social attitudes towards intercaste marriage and religious conversion. In Tamil Nadu fewer people are in favor of a total ban on intercaste marriage and religious conversion as compared to

Uttar Pradesh (See Tables 5.3 and 5.4). This points to a level of social transformation in the movement states that is missing in the nonmovement states.

**Table 5.3 Percentage of Dalits and others who agreed with the proposition: ‘Intercaste marriage should be banned.’**

States\Social Categories	Dalit	Others
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	64.5	63.5
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	35.5	44

Source: Indian National Election Study (INES). For 2004, Tamil Nadu N (Dalits) =166 and N (Others) =666, Uttar Pradesh N (Dalits) =404. And N (Others) =1337

**Table 5.4 Percentage of Dalits and others who agreed with the proposition: ‘Religious conversions should be banned.’**

States\Social Categories	Dalit	Others
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	52	60.6
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	41	49.2

Source: Indian National Election Study (INES). For 2004, Tamil Nadu N (Dalits) =166 and N (Others) =666, Uttar Pradesh N (Dalits) =404. and N(Others) =1337

As is evident from Tables 5.3 and 5.4, there is a clear difference in social attitudes towards intercaste marriages and religious conversion across Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. These attitudes are more relaxed in Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh. The weakness of a movement denouncing social hierarchy in Uttar Pradesh, and the presence of a much stronger movement in Tamil Nadu also had profound implications for the type of electoral mobilization of Dalits across the two states.

### ***Electoral Mobilization of Dalits in Uttar Pradesh***

In Uttar Pradesh, Dalits were regarded as traditional supporters of the Congress Party before party system fragmentation set in the eighties. As mentioned above, the

mobilization of Dalits in Uttar Pradesh was affected by the landlord-based land settlement system prevalent in the state. In the first few decades after Indian independence in 1947, when the landed elite continued to exercise control over the landless peasantry, the Dalit vote either did not get to the polling booth or was directed by the landed classes on how to vote. Since the local elite could deliver the vote, Congress did not mobilize Dalit voters.

Later, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi as the Congress experienced an internal split in 1969 resulting in the temporary exit of the landed elite,<sup>51</sup> Congress tried to mobilize Dalits directly. In order to reduce voter intimidation, the counting of votes was moved from polling booths to district headquarters to ensure the anonymity of group voting.<sup>52</sup> The Congress also launched the *Garibi Hatao* or “Banish Poverty” program comprised of a number of pro-poor schemes. Yet, the Congress did little to promote the acknowledgment of Dalits as social equals. Although the economic deprivation of the group was acknowledged, its social deprivation that left it exposed to oppression in rural areas was not addressed. Without a prominent Dalit movement in the state, mobilization remained restricted to the electoral cycle. The demands for equal treatment of the group did not enter the electoral arena. The day to day social indignities that Dalits faced were reinforced by their absence from the public sphere. Dalits remained invisible to history, the arts, popular culture, and the mass media. Since the social discourse remained deeply entrenched in the norms of hierarchy, Congress

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<sup>51</sup> The exit was temporary because after Indira Gandhi tightened her control over the party and political power, the landed elite thought better of resisting and returned to the party.

<sup>52</sup> While a secret ballot protects an individual voter’s anonymity, polling booth figures can reveal for which party members of a particular group are voting. Because politicians generally know the demographic breakdown of a polling booth, polling booth figures fail to protect group anonymity. See Harry Blair (1972) for an illustration.

adopted the strategy of mobilizing an alliance of ethnic groups. Each group was mobilized separately promoting leaders from within that group and brought together in an electoral coalition. In this asymmetric alliance, Congress' leaders did not derive importance on the basis of the numerical strength of their respective ethnic groups, instead, this leverage depended on whether the groups were well-organized. Dalits were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and were least organized, so their leaders possessed the least leverage. The separate mobilization of Dalits laid the foundations for strong ethnic solidarity while voting.

Since mobilization in the state was centered on Indira Gandhi, her assassination in 1984 provoked a sympathy wave that brought Congress to the power with the largest vote share in its history. But her death also took away the focal point around which Congress had been organized. The alliance politics of the Congress unraveled in the state by the early nineteen nineties. A period of party system fragmentation set in. During this time, Dalits began to shift their votes to the BSP.

The BSP rose in an environment in Uttar Pradesh in which outside the party there were hardly any organizations working for Dalit rights. As a result, the BSP was able to emerge as the sole voice of the Dalit community. The press did not highlight the issues of social exclusion and atrocities against Dalits, neither were these pursued and publicized by advocacy bodies. This silence on social exclusion was mirrored among political parties, even those that mobilized Dalits. While economic deprivation was emphasized during voter mobilization, social exclusion was ignored. The early campaigns of the BSP emphasized this neglect. The BSP was able to establish its identity around an open challenge to the hierarchical social order. The BSP strategy for

mobilization involved the complete rejection of Gandhi's ideas towards untouchability. The party also openly insulted the upper castes in its early campaigns by using inflammatory slogans. One slogan used was "Vote Hamara, raj tumhara, nahin chalega." It means, "We vote, you rule, this will not continue." The epithets reached their height during the election campaign for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly in 1993, the most notorious being "Tilak, Tarazu, Talwar. Maaro Unko Joote Char." This slogan, with its insistent rhythm in Hindi, advocates that Brahmins, Banias, and Rajputs, each identified by a slighting term, be beaten four times with a shoe – a traditionally demeaning form of punishment because of the ritual impurity of leather.

The slogans were responding to a need – the rejection of hierarchy – that made them effective with Dalit voters. Unlike the Congress which had been reluctant to go beyond the recognition of their impoverishment while mobilizing the untouchables, the BSP turned itself into a symbol of self-respect. It was not mobilizing Dalits merely along ethnic lines, but acknowledging the fundamental deprivation related to their identity. In this way, the BSP harvested the defining attribute of the Dalit identity, its invisibility, and made ethnic identity salient in the electoral arena.

Next, I present survey and interview evidence to corroborate the mechanisms proposed above. Out of the 100 voters interviewed, 49 reported they had switched their vote from the Congress to the BSP. While 26 of the respondents could recall the name of Indira Gandhi, only 12 could recall the name of a Congress chief minister suggesting how much the state Congress had come to rely on Indira's image to mobilize voters.

The locality survey conducted across forty rural and urban localities found that party representatives present in these localities belonged primarily to the Bahujan Samaj

Party. Other parties like the Congress and the Communist parties that traditionally project themselves as pro-poor parties were not present. The average number of parties represented through their party workers in localities was 1.2. In only 6 out of forty localities the survey found party workers belonging to a political party other than the BSP. Across many localities a majority of respondents reported that Congress did not have party representatives in their locality. When Congress candidates visited to campaign, they were accompanied by people from outside the village or the prominent notables of the village. But voters also said that since the rise of the BSP other parties do not campaign in their locality. One old voter put it best: “First we were ordered to vote, then people started to come to our village to request us to vote for them, now only our local BSP representative asks us for our vote.”

Congress relied on a handful of Dalit leaders within the party to mobilize the Dalit vote. None of these leaders used their position to denounce social hierarchy or encourage the social mobilization of Dalits. As an organization, the Congress remained conservative. It did not include Dalits at the base by spreading its network in their localities.<sup>53</sup> The Congress party worker was often from the dominant caste in the village and lived in a different locality. The Dalit leaders within the party remained moderate and pliant. Despite coming to rely heavily on Dalit support by the eighties, the Congress leadership could not promote a Dalit chief minister in the state. One clear example of the social conservatism within the party was a remark made by an office holder of the state Congress Party. When asked what was the Congress doing to regain its support among Dalits, the Congress Party's District President for Lucknow, the state capital,

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<sup>53</sup> This fact is especially noteworthy because so far the focus of the scholarly literature on Dalit mobilization has been on the lack of opportunities for Dalit elite to rise within the Congress, and has ignored the issue of the party's mass penetration among Dalits.

answered, “We are hoping that Dalits will realize that the BSP is out to fool them in the name of their ethnicity.... We are a traditional people. When a daughter in-law leaves the house in our state, we do not go to bring her back. She has to return herself.” The status of a daughter in-law in a traditional North Indian household is the lowest among the family members. By equating her status to that of Dalits, the Congress leader was only highlighting the attitude that has contributed to the loss of the Dalit support for the party.

Yet, even as the support for the Congress declined, it was the BSP that benefited, not another multiethnic party. The electoral rise of the Hindu nationalist BJP in Uttar Pradesh corresponds with Congress’ decline. That party was able to make inroads into the intermediate castes (Jaffrelot 2003; Dube 2007). However, among Dalits the BJP’s influence has remained limited in rural areas, where most Dalits live. In interviews, local BJP leaders brought up the hurdles that they had faced in successfully recruiting Dalit leadership in rural areas. According to them, even in instances when educated Dalit men were brought into the party organization, members from other groups did not respect their stature. Their authority was not accepted by other members of the organization. After some time, many of these recruits left the party and joined the BSP. The BSP was able to outcompete other multiethnic parties trying to recruit Dalits.

The above account of political mobilization of Dalits has argued that the Congress party’s exclusive multiethnic mobilization sowed the seeds for strong ethnic solidarity in Uttar Pradesh. And even though BSP benefits from this, the question arises: Today, what attaches the voters to the BSP?

The interviews and the focus groups clearly pointed out that individual representatives elected on the party ticket do not enjoy much credibility with Dalit voters, but the BSP does. Both Kanchi Ram (the BSP's chief ideologue) and Mayawati (the party president) are revered among voters. Despite reporting unkept promises by the party, many voters professed their loyalty to the BSP and Mayawati.

When Dalit voters were asked to explain their support for the party, in response, they often said the party gave them awaz (voice) and pehachan (recognition). Some asked, "Who else do we have?" "Which party has ever cared about us?" Other voters mentioned policies like the Ambedkar village development program, a welfare program for villages with high concentrations of Dalits, but support for BSP was strong even among those voters who had not heard of the program or had not benefited from it. However, across nearly all focus groups and interviews in rural localities, Dalits mentioned that when the BSP government is in office they feel more confident in their interaction with members of other groups and there is less intimidation. As one voter put it, "When Behinji<sup>54</sup> comes to power, it is like suddenly the dead come alive." It is this sense of dignity and presence which can be backed by state authority when the party is in office that accounts for the long-standing loyalty of Dalits to their ethnic party.

Dalits share interests as well as identities with members of other groups who live in close proximity to them. Hence, the primacy of the ethnic cleavage should not be a foregone conclusion; there can be other cleavages that cross-cut the ethnic cleavage. The continued experience of social exclusion and limited group-assertion prevented Dalits from developing alternate political identities. As a result, the ethnic cleavage is

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<sup>54</sup> "Behinji" is the Hindi term for "respected sister." Here it refers to Mayawati.

not cross-cut by other cleavages. This has ensured the Dalit vote has come to be tied strongly to the ethnic party. In a state where the legitimacy of the rank ordering of the society was not challenged prior to the electoral mobilization undertaken by the BSP, and where Dalits lack any form of representation in the public sphere, where caste continues to be strongly associated with social status, the BSP has been able to establish itself as the only representation of group identity for Dalits. The BSP's mobilization has been aided by the repeated electoral mobilization of Dalits as a separate and unequal constituency by the Congress Party.

### ***Electoral Mobilization of Dalits in Tamil Nadu***

As was the case in other parts of India, the Congress Party in the Madras Presidency (the colonial name of the region encompassing Tamil Nadu) was also dominated by Brahmin notables. Congress made its claim as the party of the freedom movement and the harbinger of Indian nationalism. Nevertheless, the party in the state faced a strong challenge from the Dravidian movement, with Naikar staunchly opposing Gandhi and setting his own approach towards the caste system. While Gandhi had opposed the social exclusion of untouchables, he was unwilling to denounce the caste system. Naikar had committed himself to the destruction of the caste system. Faced with this challenge from the Dravidian movement and the movements of lower castes, the Congress appointed Kamraj as its party president in 1946 and chief minister in 1954. Kamraj belonged to the Nadar caste which was ranked only slightly above the untouchables. With the introduction of universal franchise, the Congress Party had to turn to the support of lower caste voters. This support was not available to it through

intermediaries to the extent it was in Uttar Pradesh. Instead, the Congress in Tamil Nadu had direct access to lower caste voters including Dalits. As a result, Dalits were mobilized earlier in Tamil Nadu than in Uttar Pradesh. The hold of Congress on state politics lasted until 1967.

During the sixties, the federal government's decision to make the use of Hindi mandatory triggered strong opposition in the state paving the path for the victory of DMK in the 1967 election.<sup>55</sup> In 1971, the DMK split into two and the AIADMK was founded. Both the Dravidian parties mobilized voters on issues of social as well as economic egalitarianism. In recent times, the influence of the two Dravidian regional parties has weakened in the state. The total vote share of the rival Dravidian parties in the assembly elections was 66 percent in 1991 and has fallen to 58 percent in 2006. Party system fragmentation has gathered pace both at the state as well as the national level creating opportunities for smaller parties to succeed. Ethnic and multiethnic parties have appeared yet their success has varied. Those Dalits who have turned away from the Dravidian parties have supported multiethnic parties in larger numbers than their ethnic party.

The Dravidian ideas which took pride in a non-Brahminic past, espoused social equality, and were attentive to economic inequality formed the bedrock of the politics in Tamil Nadu. Under the influence of the Dravidian movement, the principle of hierarchy was widely denounced and publicly undermined from the founding moments of the party system during the nineteen twenties and thirties (Geetha and Rajadurai 1998; Pandian 2007). As a result, the demand for social equality was preempted by multiethnic parties, including the Congress and the Dravidian parties, and potency of

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<sup>55</sup> Hindi and Tamil come from different language families and use different scripts.

caste as an instrument of mobilization diminished in the electoral arena. Heightened caste consciousness among marginalized groups made political parties perceptive to acknowledging the principle of caste equality and social justice (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967; Subramanian 1999). Faced with the challenge of mobilizing voters possessing ethnic consciousness and demanding social equality, multiethnic parties made inclusive appeals on the bases of the Dravidian race, linguistic nationalism, and populist programs to mobilize voters. A discursive shift towards social equality allowed political parties to emphasize cross-ethnic appeals. This has lowered ethnic solidarity across ethnic groups, including Dalits, and created inclusive multiethnic politics in contrast to the exclusive multiethnic politics that exists in Uttar Pradesh. Consequently, the ethnic party has been denied the salient issue – the demand for social inclusion – and the ethnic solidarity to mobilize Dalits successfully in sufficiently large numbers to benefit from the electoral opportunities available.

Their mobilization notwithstanding, at the local level, Dalits still confront the practice of untouchability and discrimination (Visvanathan 2005; Gorringe 2005). However, these are increasingly resisted and there are also more avenues for highlighting these issues in Tamil Nadu as compared to Uttar Pradesh. Close to eighty organizations that work for Dalit welfare in Tamil Nadu publicize issues related to their needs and collect information on atrocities. Although few of these organizations are membership based, their activities, especially when they attract the attention of mass media, put pressure on political parties to respond. The organizations advocate for Dalit rights and highlight the violation of these rights through agitations. This denies the DPI the power to set and control the agenda on Dalit issues and further dampens its appeal

as the primary voice of the ethnic group.

As noted earlier, political parties mobilized Dalits directly in Tamil Nadu to a greater extent than Uttar Pradesh. The locality survey points out that parties were better represented across large Dalit localities. The average number of parties in these localities was 2.2. Out of the forty localities surveyed, there were only 8 single-party localities. While Dalits remain relatively marginalized as compared to other groups, they have been mobilized more fully in Tamil Nadu. Political parties have been more inclusive at the base than in Uttar Pradesh. With increased fragmentation of the party system, more parties have tried to mobilize Dalits. In Tamil Nadu to a large extent, Dalits are not perceived as a captive vote of a particular party. The interviews with Dalit voters pointed towards changing preferences among voters. During the interviews, sixty-eight percent of Dalit voters reported that they had voted for more than two parties and 39 percent more than 3 in their lifetimes.

The longstanding anti-caste movement allowed Dalits to develop alternate identities. The Dravidian parties mobilized voters on the basis of Tamil nationalism. The Dravidian or Tamil nationalist movement had been more inclusive towards the lower castes and drew a significant number of Dalits (Pandian 2007). The existence of Dalit movements and the influence of egalitarian ideas popularized by Periyar meant that Dalits were accepted as equals into the nationalist movement. Through it they had access to an identity that situated them at par with everyone else. This was in sharp contrast to the Hindu nationalist movement in Uttar Pradesh which failed to unite different caste groups. In the absence of a strong Dalit movement, or a movement demanding social equality, exclusionary attitudes towards Dalits did not change and the

principle of hierarchy was preserved. The BJP has not succeeded at recruiting Dalit leaders or mobilizing Dalit voters. Instead of denouncing social hierarchy and caste distinctions, the Hindu nationalists placed the entire onus of inclusion on Dalits themselves by urging them to undertake self-cleansing practices.

During my interviews and focus groups, Dalit voters in Tamil Nadu were asked their reasons for choosing parties. In explaining their support for a political party, voters cited government programs on schooling, the building of water tanks, flood relief, and populist policies by parties as reasons for their support. Even when voters brought up issues of caste discrimination and harassment by other castes, surprisingly, caste did not matter to the same extent while choosing parties as it did in Uttar Pradesh. One respondent said, "Our community is treated badly, but there are other problems, too." Another mentioned that despite caste-based differences, "We face the same problems as other castes living in our area." Additionally, voters did not identify parties with particular castes. As one voter put it, "If a party will look into the welfare of the poor, then why should we look at caste?" Voters saw parties as neutral arbiters. Moreover, the leaders of the major parties in the state were not viewed as icons for a particular caste group. This then meant that political parties, not ethnicity, have come to acquire salience in the electoral arena. The relatively lower salience of ethnicity in the electoral arena constrains the ability of the DPI to appeal to Dalits.

### ***Conclusion***

To sum up, in Uttar Pradesh, Dalits were undermobilized. Parties did not spread their networks into Dalit localities. While focusing on Dalit economic deprivation, the

Congress could ignore the issue of Dalits' social exclusion. In creating a hierarchical electoral coalition of different groups, Congress mobilized groups separately. By being mobilized separately and regularly as a group, Dalits developed high electoral solidarity. When presented with the electoral opportunity in the wake of the decline of the Congress Party and party system fragmentation, the BSP made the social exclusion of Dalits into an issue and was more successful than other parties at recruiting Dalit activists. Dalit voters gradually shifted their support towards the BSP. For these voters, the BSP emerged as the sole representation of their voice in the state.

Prior to party system fragmentation, Dalits were not undermobilized in Tamil Nadu to the extent they were in Uttar Pradesh. Under the influence of movements demanding social equality, issues of dignity and respect became routine in political discourse. Hierarchy was denounced by all parties, hence, parties could rely on cross-group appeals. This dampened ethnic solidarity among Dalits. They were less likely to vote with their ethnic group. This makes the task of ethnic mobilization more difficult for the DPI. Additionally, at the point of party system fragmentation, unlike the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, the DPI could not emerge as an unrivaled representative on Dalit issues. The DPI had to compete not only against other parties, but also against other organizations that advocate for Dalit rights. Under these conditions, Dalit voters changing their electoral preferences were more likely to turn to a multiethnic party as compared to a Dalit party.

## Chapter 6

### **Comparing the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) in Bihar with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Maharashtra**

Chapter 5 compared the mobilization of Dalits across two states of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The BSP, the Dalit party in Uttar Pradesh, has demonstrated remarkable electoral success. At the same time the Dalit Liberation Panthers, or the DPI, the Dalit party in Tamil Nadu, has failed to expand its vote share among Dalits. Through a paired comparison of the electoral performance of two additional ethnic parties representing a marginalized group, this chapter aims to further probe the validity of the argument that prior movements curtail the success of an ethnic party. Like Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the two states of Bihar and Maharashtra allow for the comparison of the electoral performance of Dalit ethnic parties – the LJP and the BSP – in a fragmenting party system. While Bihar is a nonmovement state where a Dalit movement has not arisen, Maharashtra is the state where the Dalit movement has been the strongest in the country.

Maharashtra and Bihar are the second and third largest states in India. Given their large populations, both states elect a substantial number of representatives to the national parliament. Maharashtra elects 41 members to the Parliament and 288 to the state assembly. Bihar elects 40 to the national parliament and 243 to the state assembly.

Three parliamentary and 18 assembly electoral districts in Maharashtra are reserved for Dalits. The corresponding numbers for Bihar are 7 for the national

parliament and 39 for the state assembly. A small difference in Dalit populations between the two states should not result in a substantial difference in the number of electoral districts reserved for Dalits.

This inconsistency stems from the fact that more Dalits migrated from rural areas to cities in Maharashtra than was the case in Bihar. Therefore Dalits tend to be more concentrated across fewer electoral districts in Maharashtra as compared to Bihar. The fragmentation of the party system in the past decade in both Maharashtra as well as Bihar has attracted the entry of new Dalit parties in the electoral arena. The effective number of political parties (ENPV) is 7.70 for Bihar and 5.64 for Maharashtra.<sup>56</sup>

**Table 6.1 Population and Electoral district profile of Bihar and Maharashtra**

	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percentage of Dalits</b>	<b>No. of Parliamentary districts</b>	<b>Reserved for Dalits</b>	<b>No of Assembly districts</b>	<b>Reserved for Dalits</b>
<b>Bihar</b>	82878796	15.7	40	7	243	39
<b>Maharashtra</b>	96752247	10.2	41	3	288	18

Source: Census of India, Government of India 2001

The decline of Congress in Bihar was swift. The vote share of the Congress slipped from 41 percent in 1951 to 34 percent in 1980 to 25 percent in 1990. Despite a political opportunity structure favoring the rise of an ethnic party since the early nineties, a Dalit party is a recent introduction to state politics. The Lok Janshakti Party, or LJP, was launched in 2000 and has competed only in the past two elections in the state. It won a total of four parliamentary districts and received 11.5 percent of the Dalit vote in the 2004 parliamentary election. In the 2005 state assembly election, it received 31 percent, a plurality, of the Dalit votes and won 10 electoral districts. The BSP also contests elections in Bihar, but its performance has been limited thus far. Its vote share

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Wilkinson 2004: 156. ENPV was calculated for the period February – April 2002.

among Dalits during the 2005 assembly election was 10 percent and it won 4 electoral districts in the state assembly.<sup>57</sup> What is noteworthy is that between themselves the LJP and the BSP, the two Dalit parties, polled 40 percent of the Dalit vote in the state.

In Bihar, the support of Dalits began to shift away from the Congress Party in the nineteen eighties. According to the Indian National Election Survey (INES) carried out in 1971, 70 percent of Dalits reported that they voted for the Congress Party. By 1996, 15 percent Dalits reported that they were supporting the Congress Party. This figure had declined to 3.4 percent by 2004. In the early nineteen nineties, the Dalit vote shifted to the Janata Dal United (JDU) a multiethnic party specifically espousing the cause of the lower castes, including the Dalits. In 1995, 50 percent of Dalits who were polled by the INES reported that they had supported JDU in the state assembly election. With a split in the JDU, the LJP, the emergent Dalit party, has been able to garner a plurality of the Dalit vote.

By contrast, a Dalit party is not new to Maharashtra. The Republican Party of India (RPI) has been present since the first election in the state, although its influence has remained very limited with the majority of the Dalits supporting the Congress. A recent split in the Congress in 1996 and the creation of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has created the opportunity for the BSP to enter politics in the state. The party's national profile and willingness to compete across all electoral districts (as opposed to a limited number of districts as new parties typically do) has made it into the most prominent Dalit party in the state. Although the party has failed to win a single seat so far, its vote share in the parliamentary elections increased from 2.3 percent in 1999 to 14 percent in 2004. In the 2004 state assembly election, the BSP received 20 percent of

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<sup>57</sup> The BSP performs well in districts adjoining Uttar Pradesh.

the Dalit vote. As these figures suggest, it has yet to emerge as the most popular party among the ethnic voters. In the same election, Congress and its ally the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) received the plurality of Dalit votes. Between them, the alliance of the two parties received 50 percent of Dalit votes. Forty-six percent of Dalit voters still identify themselves as traditional supporters of the Congress in Maharashtra (INES 2004). As compared to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where the Dalits exited from the Congress in less than a decade with the party failing to arrest the outflow, the Congress has been more successful in holding onto the Dalit vote in Maharashtra even as the fragmentation of the party system has created the electoral opportunity for the Dalit party to succeed.

Dalits form a smaller share of the total state populations in Bihar and Maharashtra, so there are greater limits to the success of their ethnic parties there. The electoral performance of the LJP in Bihar and BSP in Maharashtra demonstrates a clear variation in ethnic party performance during the period of opportunity. Yet this variance is not as substantial as is the case in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

### ***Ethnic Solidarity Among Dalits***

Evidence gathered through surveys and interviews points towards a clear difference in the salience of ethnicity in electoral politics across Maharashtra and Bihar. According to the National Election Study for 2004, 47 percent of Dalit voters reported that it is important to vote with one's caste and community. In the same survey, Dalits in Maharashtra displayed a lower level of ethnic solidarity; 37 percent voters reported it was important to vote with one's caste and community. This gap in responses increases

for the 18 - 25 age group. While 54 percent Dalits agree with the proposition in Bihar, only 26 percent do in Maharashtra. There is a difference in ethnic solidarity across the two states which the second set of figures suggests may be increasing. To reiterate, levels of ethnic solidarity – that is the willingness of a voter to vote with a co-ethnic – are consequential for the electoral prospects of an ethnic party. During my one-on-one interviews, 40 percent of Dalits said that they would like to see Ram Vilas Paswan, the leader of the LJP, become the chief minister of Bihar. Only 12 percent of Dalits in Maharashtra chose the state president of the BSP as their preferred chief minister. Support for the state party president is used as a barometer for judging the support for the party within the ethnic group. Dalit voters were also asked if caste was an important consideration in choosing political parties. In Bihar, 39 percent said it was. In Maharashtra, only 14 percent said it was.

The following section will trace the history of the mobilization of Dalits across the two states to show how this difference in ethnic solidarity came about. It will also show why the representational value of an ethnic party to the ethnic voter differs between the two states. To facilitate a clear reading of the argument and evidence, this chapter follows the same format as the previous one. I will first present the history of the social mobilization of Dalits in Bihar and Maharashtra then go on to discuss how this pattern of prior mobilization impacts the electoral mobilization of Dalits in the two states.

**Table 6.2 Percentage of Dalits who agreed: 'One should vote in the same way as one's caste'**

States\Ethnic Solidarity	All age groups	18-25 yrs
<i>Maharashtra</i>	37	25.6
<i>Bihar</i>	46.6	53.8

Source: Indian National Election Study (INES).  
For 2004, Maharashtra N=215 and Bihar N=222.

### ***Movements in Bihar and Maharashtra***

#### ***Social Mobilization in Bihar***

Bihar's feudal land settlement system and limited industrialization during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century ossified the state's social structure. This deprived the untouchables of the resources and opportunities to organize. In urban Bihar, a Dalit movement, even a limited one, did not arise. Unlike Uttar Pradesh, there was little industrial activity to create a demand for labor from rural areas. Untouchables remained confined to rural Bihar and the emergence of an organizing elite was delayed. This group only appeared after independence, largely as a consequence of affirmative action policies on the part of the state.

In rural Bihar, in addition to living in abject poverty, untouchables remained substantially subservient to the will of the dominant landed castes. Without social churning among the lower orders in Bihar, the principle of hierarchy was not challenged and denounced. In an environment devoid of opportunities and resources for the spread of subaltern movements, the coincidence between social and economic hierarchy was very strong.

Even outside efforts for the inclusion of untouchables were for the most part absent. Gandhi's call for the uplift of untouchables failed to motivate the Congress to

work towards their social inclusion here. Similarly, the Hindu nationalists' self-cleansing movement among untouchables has been very weak. As noted earlier, the land tenure system imposed enormous constraints on the peasantry in Bihar. The whole of Bihar was brought under the landlord controlled permanent settlement system as early as 1793.<sup>58</sup> Across the state, the peasantry that was drawn largely from intermediate and untouchable castes occasionally revolted; these protests were swiftly quelled. During this period, the Congress, instead of aligning itself with the peasant farmer movement, remained wary of it. The party was eager to avoid a confrontation with the landed classes.

The advent of democracy and the compulsions of electoral politics meant that after independence Bihar was the first state to abolish the zamindari land settlement system. Despite this, the abolition of the system took ten years to implement and was not followed by comprehensive land redistribution. State indifference and reluctance on this count was politically motivated. Many members of the ruling Congress and the administrative machinery either belonged to landowning families or were connected to them (Frankel 1990). The collusion between the state administration and landlords was responsible for a weak policy and its deeply flawed implementation. The piecemeal reforms did not disturb the social structure. Given the control exercised on power by a small minority, contestation was unavoidable. It arose within electoral arena and without.

Class relations centered on land ownership defined a key cleavage in Bihar. The

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<sup>58</sup> In fact, Gandhi's first civil disobedience action occurred in Bihar. In 1929 he began a movement in the district of Champaran against the excessive taxation imposed on the peasantry by the indigo plantation owners. Yet this protest did little to change the policies or the feudal control of the well-organized landlords over the poor peasantry.

landowners, drawn primarily from the upper castes, were pitted against the tenant farmers, drawn from the intermediate castes and the agricultural workers, a large section of whom are untouchables. The resulting polarization enabled an alliance, albeit an asymmetric one, between the two groups. (Untouchables are typically socially and economically more deprived than members of intermediate castes.) Outside electoral politics, this conflict manifested itself in the mobilization of a Maoist guerilla movement that in spite of state repression and the counter mobilization of landlord militias has gradually gained in strength since the nineteen sixties. Drawing its strength from members of intermediate castes and Untouchables, the Maoist insurgents, known locally as Naxalites, have attacked the police, massacred landlords, and enforced boycotts on landlords. In retaliation, the state has captured, tortured and killed Maoists, and landlords' private armies have massacred peasants seen as being sympathetic to them (Bhatia 2005). Thousands have died in this three decade old conflict. The movement has weakened the control of the landed elite in rural Bihar, creating an opportunity for Dalit mobilization.

Despite its influence on the mobilization of lower castes, the Maoist movement has failed to promote social inclusion of Dalits. First, it is a violent insurgency movement not a popular mass movement. It thus rejects democratic politics. Second, and more important, the Maoists view their struggle primarily in terms of class conflict. Hence, theirs is not a movement directed at rejecting social hierarchy, merely its class manifestation. The Maoists are therefore unable to address the social as well as cultural exclusion of Dalits, an issue that has increasingly become relevant for them as the group as Dalits have been released from the relationship of total dependence on the landlords.

The structural domination of Dalits in Bihar imposed overwhelming constraints against mobilization. Unlike Uttar Pradesh, rural Bihar experienced fewer movements. Mobilization was primarily centered on land relations. However, with a gradual waning of the power of the landed elite and the breakdown of their control over Dalits, Dalits have begun to mobilize. This mobilization is primarily restricted to electoral politics, however.

### *Social Mobilization in Maharashtra*

Much earlier than Bihar, untouchable uplift began in Maharashtra under the leadership of a social reformer called Jyotiba Phule in 1858. He was the first Hindu to open a school to educate children among the untouchables. Phule was not seeking mere accommodation within the caste system, rather his efforts represented a rejection of the hierarchical social order (O'Hanlon 2002). Other social reformers in the twentieth century followed in his footsteps continuing his pioneering work. Prominent among these were Shahu Maharaj and B.R Ambedkar. Their efforts took place against the backdrop of a colonial encounter that was different from Bihar and similar to Tamil Nadu. In Maharashtra, resources as well as opportunities for movements appeared earlier than was the case in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Like in Tamil Nadu, Christian missionaries became involved in the education of untouchables, though their involvement was less widespread in Maharashtra. Starting in the early nineteenth century, untouchables were also recruited heavily into the colonial army. At the same time, industrial townships that sprang up in the state drew landless untouchables in large numbers. They were employed with the railways as well as in textile mills.

Independent of the immediate control of dominant castes and increasingly lettered, untouchables in urban Maharashtra began to be mobilized through social movements. Much of the early emphasis was on education (Lele 1990; Gokhale 1990). Ambedkar further galvanized this movement by making demands for state support for overcoming exclusion. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's impact on the struggle against untouchability and on Dalit politics was felt far beyond Maharashtra. Born in the house of an army soldier, he was given a scholarship by a local prince to study in the United States where he gained a Ph.D. in Economics at Columbia University. In New York, he came face-to-face with the African American experience with discrimination.

B.R. Ambedkar returned to India after passing the bar at Gray's Inn in London and became involved in the struggle for the human rights of Dalits. In addition to representing the untouchable population in the three roundtable conferences in London in the nineteen thirties, he agitated for equal access of untouchables to public spaces, including water tanks and temples. He was deeply skeptical of Hindu reform movements because, according to him, while working for the inclusion of Dalits these did not reject the hierarchical differentiation in the social order. The same reasoning brought him in direct conflict with Gandhi and his ideas on the uplift of untouchables. A prolific writer, Ambedkar wrote extensively against the caste system and went to the extent of publically burning sacred Hindu texts. Late in his life, Ambedkar pledged to leave Hindu religion. In 1956, he led many hundreds of thousands of untouchables in Maharashtra in a mass conversion to Buddhism. Although there is a long history of lower caste conversion to Islam, Sikhism and Christianity, Ambedkar's action turned religious conversion into a political act, an act of civil disobedience. It made religious

conversion politically controversial. Conversion became an instrument of protest against social exclusion.

Ambedkar also gave a call to Dalits to leave villages for the anonymity of urban areas. He despised village life, calling villages a cesspool, "a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism"(Jaffrelot 2005). He gave a call to Dalits to educate, organize, and agitate. In keeping with his commitment to cause of educating Dalits, Ambedkar opened a number of colleges for educating Dalit students.

In 1971, another prominent Dalit movement arose in Western Maharashtra – the Dalit Panthers. A younger generation of Dalit leaders launched this movement, and it attracted support from urban, slum-dwelling Dalits. It was far more militant in its approach than the previous movements. The Dalit Panthers failed to develop a coherent program, though, and disintegrated by the mid-nineteen eighties. Although it had few tangible gains to report, the movement forced political parties in Maharashtra to become more attentive to Dalit concerns (Murugkar 1991). It established a militant edge to Dalit mobilization which continues to surface when acts of atrocities and violence against Dalits are reported in the state. This is a distinction between movement and nonmovement states that needs to be underscored. Dalits in the movement states acquired the capacity to retaliate when attacked earlier than those living in the nonmovement states.

Although many of the Dalit movement activities appeared in urban Maharashtra, they gradually percolated into rural areas. This meant that Dalit assertion was not restricted to urban pockets alone, but it also gained popularity among rural Dalits (Lele 1990). The land settlement system in rural Maharashtra was not as repressive as in

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The untouchables there were stationed at the bottom of social and economic hierarchy, yet the dominant castes did not enjoy the same control over their lives.

A longstanding Dalit movement has mainstreamed the concerns and symbols of Dalits in Maharashtra to the extent that they are recognized by all political parties in the state. Gradually, resistance to the inclusion of Dalits and their symbols has weakened. For example, in a state where the renaming of a state university after B.R. Ambedkar in 1980 resulted in violent clashes between the dominant castes and Dalits, today B.R. Ambedkar's name is visible across the state. In fact, Ambedkar is revered and celebrated as one of the state's most prominent public figures.

Successive state governments in Maharashtra have also supported private as well as public Dalit organizations. Maharashtra is home to a vibrant Dalit literary movement. The publications of Dalit authors are read not only among Dalits, but across society. Together these aspects of the Dalit movement have brought recognition to the Dalit identity in the public sphere and addressed the deficit associated with it. Bihar has remained untouched by the same level of social mobilization.

The effects of the differing trajectories of Dalit mobilization are reflected in the social attitudes towards inter-caste marriage and religious conversion in Bihar and Maharashtra. More people in Bihar favor a total ban on the two activities than is the case in Maharashtra. This difference in attitude points to two distinct social terrains in which the political parties practice electoral politics. The early mobilization of Dalits through movement politics in Maharashtra and the absence of a comparable mobilization in Bihar shaped their electoral mobilization across the two states.

**Table 6.3 Percentage of Dalits and others who agreed with the proposition: ‘Intercaste marriage should be banned.’**

States\Social Categories	Dalit	Others
<i>Maharashtra</i>	45.5	42.4
<i>Bihar</i>	59.6	52.4

Source: Indian National Election Study (INES).

For 2004, Maharashtra N (Dalits) =215 and N (Others) =1120

Bihar N (Dalits) =222 and N (Others) = 934

**Table 6.4 Percentage of Dalits and others who agreed with the proposition: ‘Religious conversions should be banned.’**

States\Social Categories	Dalit	Others
<i>Maharashtra</i>	45.5	46.3
<i>Bihar</i>	52.3	61.3

Source: Indian National Election Study (INES).

For 2004, Maharashtra N (Dalits) =215 and N (Others) =1120

Bihar N (Dalits) =222 and N (Others) = 934

### ***Political Mobilization of Dalits in Bihar***

The decline of the Congress in Bihar followed a trajectory similar to that of the party in Uttar Pradesh. Yet, a Dalit party did not appear immediately after the collapse of Congress. After Independence in 1947, the Congress Party dominated electoral politics in Bihar. Its vote share was 48 percent in the 1951 parliamentary election. The party was controlled by the upper castes and was strongly beholden to landed interests. By 1967, the stranglehold of the party on electoral politics began to weaken. Dalits were poorly represented in the party during this phase of its dominance (Frankel 1990). The party obtained the Dalit vote either by default as the governing party, or through coercion. In the presence of internal and external constraints against mobilization, there was hardly any group mobilization among Dalits (Ghosh and Kumar 2003).

Following the internal split in the Congress in 1969, which also happened in

Uttar Pradesh, in the early seventies Congress tried to mobilize Dalits directly. The party had to find ways to circumvent the control of voters by the traditional elite, who had left the party in large numbers following the split. A combination of measures – the poverty alleviation program and making the electoral environment more secure for participation of the poor – were used. At this time, Dalit representatives were also included in the state cabinet.

Yet, these measures did little to alleviate the invisibility of Dalits, or to reduce their subjugation that was worse than in neighboring Uttar Pradesh. The Congress was also not able to check growing upper caste violence against Dalits. Often this had tacit state support because of a substantial presence of the dominant castes in the state administration. The increase in violence was triggered by the campaign of Maoist guerrilla movements against landlords. Even as electoral compulsions facing Congress had altered, the rigid social structure ensured that the issue of Dalit subjugation remained off the state's agenda. In the absence of a Dalit movement, or a movement demanding social equality, the Congress was not compelled to be attentive to Dalit concerns and it failed to mobilize the group fully.

The party's identity was closely tied with that of Indira Gandhi, the prime minister, while the chief ministers in the state came and went at the whim of the party's national leadership. As a centralized party, the Congress used the strategy of coordinating the vote by using its top leadership as a focal point. After the death of Indira Gandhi in 1984, the Congress unraveled swiftly in the state. In response to this period of opportunity in the political system, parties dominated by intermediate castes came to control state politics. The Janta Dal United (JDU), a coalition of intermediate

castes and Dalits, came to power in 1990. The JDU mobilized Dalits on the basis of an anti-upper caste alliance constructed against the backdrop of the land rights struggle in the state. The emergence of this party also coincided with the intensification of the violence between landlord armies and the Maoist guerillas during the decades of the nineteen eighties and nineties.

The JDU had among its ranks two leaders who embodied subaltern aspirations. These included Lalu Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan. Lalu Yadav emerged as a symbol of resistance to upper caste dominance. During his election rallies, he openly challenged the upper castes, publicized his visits to Dalit localities, and publicly reprimanded upper-caste civil servants. In a state where power had been considered as the exclusive preserve of the upper castes, the ascendance of leaders like Lalu Yadav marked a sharp departure from the norms of politics in Bihar. Yadav introduced the issues of respect and dignity to the mainstream political discourse in the state. For example, during the first of Lalu Yadav's governments, the JDU went as far as using the slogan, "Vikaas nahiñ, sammaan chahiye" (We need dignity, not development). Another slogan, "Bhurabal hatao," meaning "Wipe out the upper castes," was also common. "Bhurabal" is a Hindi-language acronym for the four upper-caste groups in Bihar: Bhumihars, Rajputs, Brahmins, and Lals (Kayasths).

Even as economic development in the state began to stall quite severely between 1990-95, the JDU garnered 50 percent of the Dalit vote in the 1995 state assembly elections. In 1996, though, the JDU split. Lalu Yadav formed his own party called the Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD), the "National People's Group." While the RJD's appeal transcended different groups, its mobilization strategy was similar to Congress',

whereby groups were mobilized separately. In this sense, the RJD was also a group alliance. Following a series of scandals related to laundering of public finances and with a worsening economic and law and order situation in Bihar, the RJD began to lose its vote share as different groups drifted away from the party. This then created another opening for small parties. In 2000, Ram Vilas Paswan – the most prominent Dalit leader in Bihar – launched his Dalit-based Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), or “People Power Party.” By the 2005, the LJP was able to garner a plurality of the Dalit vote.<sup>59</sup>

The mobilization of Dalits in Bihar occurred later than in most other states in India. Three factors have aided the electoral mobilization of Dalits in recent times. First, the coercion of Dalits during the electoral process has become increasingly difficult. On the day of voting, the Election Commission of India takes extraordinary measures to protect voters against coercion. In Bihar, where voter intimidation has been particularly rampant, federal forces are brought from outside the state to guard polling booths. Second, the control of the landed groups is in decline. Besides the Maoist guerilla movements that have weakened the stranglehold of the upper caste in rural areas, Lalu Yadav's rule since 1990 denied them ready access to state power. Additionally, mechanization and fragmentation of land holdings have also broken down the relationship of dependence between the landowners and their agriculture workers. Together, these have begun to lift some of the constraints against mobilization faced by Dalits. Third, although poorly implemented, fifty years of affirmative action policies have produced a fledgling Dalit middle class to support political entrepreneurs.

The appearance of parties representing subaltern groups and Dalit leaders are

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<sup>59</sup> After being in power for 15 years, Lalu Yadav's government was voted out in 2005. In a survey carried out in 2005, 33 percent of Dalits reported that Lalu Yadav's rule gave power to the downtrodden.

an outcome of this process. Most of this mobilization still occurs around elections, however. In Bihar, while Dalits continue to be socially excluded and face violence, there are few organizations that highlight their plight or advocate for their concerns. Outside electoral politics there is no discussion of the exclusion of Dalits. Consequently, Dalits look to political parties to draw attention to their concerns. Next, I present some of the evidence gathered through surveys and interviews to explain the rise of the LJP.

During one-on-one interviews, 42 percent of voters reported they had experienced intimidation during elections at some point. The corresponding figures were 24 percent for Uttar Pradesh, 6 percent in Maharashtra, and 10 percent in Tamil Nadu. Since the Congress received a sizable Dalit vote through intermediaries, it did not expand its base and recruit party workers in Dalit localities. Even when it began to mobilize voters directly, it had a very thin base of party workers among Dalits.<sup>60</sup> My locality survey points to the under representation of parties in Dalit localities. The average number of parties in Dalit localities was 0.8. Out of the forty localities, in 12 localities no party worker could be contacted. Even the LJP is not represented across all the Dalit localities.

During interviews, when voters were asked to recall the name of a Congress leader, only 8 percent voters could recall the name of a Congress chief minister, while 25 percent were able to recall Indira Gandhi's name. This again suggests the extent to which the identity of the Congress Party was synonymous with her. According to the 2004 National Election Study, 24 percent of Dalit voters in Bihar reported they were not

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<sup>60</sup> Other parties in the state also sometimes obtained their support through coercion. Essentially if the dominant caste in a village was voting for a particular candidate, Dalits were asked to do the same (Blair 1972)

traditional supporters of any party. (The corresponding figure for Maharashtra was 10 percent, Uttar Pradesh was 14 percent, and Tamil Nadu was 12 percent.) This suggests that that in addition to being under mobilized, a substantial number of voters in Bihar have not been mobilized at all.

Bihari Dalits have remained vulnerable to coercion and have been viewed as the captive vote of dominant castes. Political parties have not competed over the Dalit vote until recently. During interviews, party workers often mentioned it was futile to campaign in many Dalit localities in rural areas since Dalits there often voted under the pressure of the dominant caste in their village. This pattern has begun to change gradually, suggesting that Dalit ethnic parties are likely to expand their vote share further. As I have argued, the LJP benefits from the group-based electoral mobilization carried out first by the Congress and later by the RJD.

Still, the norms of hierarchy continue to be strong in the absence of a long-standing social movement. This prevents Dalits from being widely accepted within other political parties as social equals, thereby not allowing them to develop multiple political identities. In spite of sharing a class identity with members of the intermediate castes, who are also landless peasants and tenant farmers, Dalits are treated as social inferiors by them across the state. This is also one of the major reasons why the Communist parties, despite campaigning for the poor, have had limited success in the state. These parties have successfully mobilized Dalits in pockets where there is high polarization between the upper-caste landlords and the tenant farmers and landless peasants. In these areas, mobilization lowers ethnic solidarity among Dalits, with those

who are tied to a communist party preferring to vote with the party cadre rather than their ethnic group.

Dalit voters who are drawn to their ethnic party more than another during the period of opportunity cite reasons which are identical to those given in Uttar Pradesh. To them, the Dalit party offers the unique and dramatic opportunity for the assertion of ethnic pride for an identity that is still considered stigmatized. The Dalit party and its leadership are the only representation of the group's identity in the public sphere. The party also marks an end to the alienation Dalits have experienced with respect to the political process. It is this, rather than the promise of material gains, that motivates Dalits' choice of the LJP over other political parties. A substantial number of these voters support the LJP's immediate prospects for gaining political power.

### ***Why do Dalits Support Their Ethnic Party?***

In the voter sample for Bihar, 34 percent voters said that they had supported LJP in the state assembly election. While some said that they had voted for the party because others in the locality were also going to vote for the party, close to 60 percent gave other reasons. Among the following were the most commonly occurring reasons: 'Paswan is a leader of the downtrodden.' 'Everyone else gets to vote for their party, why should I not vote for mine?' 'Other parties do not care about our deprivation. Now we have our own political party.'

In the 2005 assembly election, the LJP received 32 percent of the Dalit vote in the state. What made this support remarkable was that the LJP had eschewed ties with the two major coalitions competing in the state assembly elections, and it was obvious

that this was going to diminish its ability to win districts, which in turn would diminish the party's ability to influence the coalition government after the election. Still, Dalits voted for the LJP in large numbers. In the 2005 Center for the Study of Developing Societies' assembly election study, a plurality of Dalits, 30 percent, chose the LJP as the political party most likely to look after the needs of their caste community. These figures demonstrate high confidence in a party that has only recently begun to contest elections, and that has never been in office at the state level.

I argue that since the social structure in the state had not been challenged by a movement opposing social hierarchy, group separation remained strong. Congress therefore mobilized each groups separately and unequally. Initially Dalits were not mobilized. Later as Congress began to mobilize them directly, even though Dalits derived minimal benefits from the group-based electoral coalitions, repeated group-based mobilization reinforced their ethnic identity and created bonds of solidarity in the electoral arena. The JDU and subsequently the RJD took advantage of this process. More recently, the LJP has begun to benefit from this ethnic solidarity. Gradually, as the constraints against mobilization have diminished, Dalits have been mobilized directly. Yet, their ongoing exclusion means that they remain caught in an identity trap, which then sustains high ethnic solidarity. The exclusion also implies that a growing number of Dalits see their ethnic party as the source of presence and ethnic pride.

### ***The Electoral Mobilization of Dalits in Maharashtra***

A Dalit movement and its emphasis on social inclusion meant that the Congress was more sensitive to Dalit concerns in Maharashtra. Despite being the dominant party

in the state and garnering a substantial vote share of the Dalits, the Congress allied with the RPI, a small Dalit party. Gradually, the Congress appropriated the symbols and the issues of the Dalit party. Even as Congress dominance has declined, with the party undergoing three splits in 1969, 1978, and 1998, it has been able to retain a significant vote share among Dalits. Although Dalits predominantly vote for the Congress, with increasing party system fragmentation this has not deterred other parties from building a support base among the group. The Dalit support for the Congress Party has declined from 49 percent in 1999 to 26 percent in 2004, according to the CSDS' state election studies for the assembly elections for those years. The BSP has entered electoral politics in Maharashtra during this period of opportunity; it began contesting elections in 1999. Even though it has mobilized an electorate possessing a high ethnic consciousness, the party has failed to gain a substantial share of the Dalit vote. It has not succeeded in winning a single seat so far.

To begin with, in Maharashtra the Congress had direct access to Dalit voters and since Dalits were better organized, it had to mobilize the group fully. It was attentive to social as well as economic deprivation. Given growing acceptance of the principle of social equality, the party has been able to mobilize voters using cross-group appeals. Gradually, other parties have also followed in the same direction resulting in lower overall ethnic solidarity. Under these conditions, the BSP has struggled to amass the Dalit vote.

The visibility of Dalits and their symbols also takes away from the value of the BSP as a representation of group pride. Instead of being the only representation of group identity in the public sphere, the BSP is just one of many others. Dalit voters

were mobilized earlier in Maharashtra and parties have mobilized them directly rather than via an intermediary group. The locality survey found that more parties were represented in Dalit localities, too. The average number of parties across 40 localities was 1.8. While there were no localities without a party worker, there were only 5 localities with party workers from less than two parties.

A large share of Dalit voters support the Congress and its allies, however, with the fragmentation of the party system, other parties also recruit Dalit party workers in rural as well as urban Maharashtra. The Shiv Sena, a regional party closely identified with the dominant castes, has Dalit party workers and also runs Dalit candidates in municipal and panchayat elections. Having previously opposed Dalit mobilization and benefited from the backlash against it, the party has altered direction in the past few elections. It has gradually tried to mobilize members of the group. In recent times it has called for an electoral alliance with Dalits.<sup>61</sup> Multiethnic parties are more inclusive in Maharashtra. While economic deprivation remains a significant issue, the salience of recognition as an issue has diminished considerably. Dalit voters express a lower level of ethnic solidarity while choosing a political party. This has an adverse effect on their ethnic party's ability to consolidate the ethnic vote.

Viewed from the Dalit party's perspective, the ubiquity of Dalit symbols and the presence of Dalit organizations poses an additional challenge for the BSP. The party does not possess the same significance of being the only symbol of Dalit identity as it

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<sup>61</sup> Another noteworthy fact is that even though out of the four states, Maharashtra has the smallest Dalit population, it is one of the very few states where Congress has had a Dalit chief minister in Susheel Kumar Shinde. Although Shinde is a prominent Congress leader in the state, chief ministerial positions are decided by the national leadership. The decision to appoint Shinde was a strategic one. It was taken in response to the entry of BSP in electoral politics in the state. This is why this is noteworthy. While Congress could appoint a Dalit chief minister in Maharashtra, it could not do the same in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where the party relied on a much larger support base of Dalit voters.

does in Uttar Pradesh, and as the LJP does in Bihar. As a result, its campaign slogans that were effective in mobilizing Dalits in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have not been as effective in Maharashtra. A BSP district president in Nagpur acknowledged this problem: "Maharashtra is the karm bhumi (motherland) of Dalit politics. In this region everyone wears a blue cap. That makes it very difficult for us to establish an emotional connection with the voter."<sup>62</sup>

Why do Dalits support their ethnic party? In the voter sample of 100 Dalit voters, 15 reported during the open-ended interview that they had supported the BSP. Out of these, 6 said they had decided to do so because their economic conditions had not improved during the last government's rule. Only 5 said they had supported the BSP because it was their ethnic party. Among the 37 voters who said they supported the Congress, close to 40 percent gave reasons that were related to party performance. They spoke about constituency work, like the building of a road in the village or the upgradation of a school. Still others said that the Congress was a better party for the poor than its competitors. These factors contribute to an electoral environment in which the salience of ethnicity for members of a marginalized group is lower than it is in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The long-standing alliance between the Congress and the RPI has meant that Dalits in Maharashtra have been mobilized across ethnic cleavages by the Congress, while being mobilized along ethnic cleavages by the RPI. Over time, the influence of RPI has diminished. Yet, as the BSP's moderate performance shows, the BSP derives some benefit from group-based mobilization under the RPI. At the same time, lower

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<sup>62</sup> The color blue is often associated with Dalit mobilization since it was the color of the party of the first political party launched by B.R. Ambedkar.

ethnic solidarity among younger voters suggests that the group effect of RPI mobilization may be declining. Although ethnic consciousness among Dalits is very strong, even higher than for Dalit voters in Bihar, it does not automatically translate into electoral success for the BSP.

In Bihar, historically Dalits experienced a great deal of subjugation at the hands of the dominant landowning castes. To begin with, the Congress did not mobilize Dalits because it could garner their support through intermediaries. Later Dalits were undermobilized by the Congress. In the absence of social mobilization among Dalits, their acknowledgment was confined to the electoral cycle and their recognition limited to being the vote block of the destitute that parties could mobilize easily. However, the Congress Party's strategy of exclusive multiethnic politics was practiced regularly because the electoral cycle had created ethnic solidarity among Dalits. The collapse of the Congress in Bihar has allowed other parties to take advantage of this solidarity. This solidarity is constrained, however. A strong landlord-based land settlement system in Bihar provides favorable conditions for class politics. A Maoist guerilla movement has forged an alliance in parts of the state between the members of the intermediate castes and Dalits against the landowning upper castes. Nevertheless, the social exclusion of Dalits and their total invisibility in the public sphere coupled with a moderately strong ethnic solidarity allows the Dalit ethnic party to take advantage of the electoral opportunity offered by the fragmentation of the party system.

A prominent historical Dalit movement in Maharashtra has allowed the development of inclusive multiethnic mobilization and the recognition of Dalits as social equals. As a result, while on the one hand, Dalit voters are able to access multiple

political identities, on the other, the Dalit ethnic party is not the sole representative of Dalit identity. Together both these effects of prior mobilization undermine the electoral prospects of the ethnic party. The existence of the RPI, a small ethnic party, is responsible for a limited rehearsal of group-based mobilization which has encouraged exclusive multiethnic mobilization. The BSP, the ethnic party has benefited from this mobilization in its effort of mobilizing Dalits in Maharashtra.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Mobilization and Well-Being**

So far in the three preceding chapters the following argument has been presented: In hierarchical societies (comprising dominant and subordinate groups) under a competitive SMDP electoral system, prior movements of a marginalized ethnic group that demand social equality can curtail the success of an ethnic party. Prior movements induce a discursive shift involving the rejection of the social order. In order to gain its support, parties have to mobilize the marginalized group directly – they have to respond to the group’s recognition-related demands. This enables inclusive multiethnic politics characterized by cross-group mobilization. The absence of movements results in the marginalized group’s undermobilization by political parties. This preserves the issue of social exclusion for ethnic parties to mobilize on during the period of opportunity. It also results in exclusive multiethnic politics characterized by mobilization through group alliances. In addition to the electoral prospects for an emergent ethnic party of a marginalized group, this argument has significant implications for the types of distributive policies – ethnically or economically targeted – that are designed and implemented across different states.

For the purpose of this chapter, ethnically targeted policies are those that are designed to distribute goods and services to a particular group.

Whereas economically targeted policies do not discriminate between ethnic groups while distributing goods and services on the bases of an economic criterion.

These two forms of welfare policy targeting are not mutually exclusive; however, ethnic targeting of policies has especially pernicious effects. In a society in which a substantial section of every group is poor, such policies exacerbate inter-group conflict

I identify three mechanisms rooted in the argument that influences the type, continuity, and content of policy. First, inclusive multiethnic mobilization enables the provision of economically targeted policies, while exclusive multiethnic mobilization is associated with ethnically targeted policies. Second, a corollary of the previous mechanism is that inclusive politics produces incentives for the durability of policies over time. Exclusive multiethnic politics does not generate incentives for policy durability. Economically targeted policies survive a change in government because all parties mobilize the poor. In contrast, ethnically targeted policies are likely to be suspended as soon as the party supported by the ethnic group leaves office. Third, mobilization impacts the production and provision of material and symbolic goods. The the prior mobilization of a marginalized group reduces the scarcity of symbolic ethnic goods in the public sphere thus reducing the probability that political parties can substitute them for material goods while designing policies. The absence of prior self-mobilization of a group produces a scarcity of symbolic ethnic goods which the ethnic

party of a marginalized group can substitute for material goods thus undersupplying material goods. The following discussion elaborates on these policy implications of prior mobilization.

In Tamil Nadu, owing to the Dravidian movement, since there appeared a consensus on the rejection of the social order, electoral mobilization did not emphasize ethnic cleavages. Dalits were mobilized by all political parties. All voters were perceived as present or future supporters, thus policies designed and implemented by political parties were directed at all groups instead of at a particular group. This also meant that when rival parties took office, they did not suspend or reverse policies implemented by previous governments. Instead they added to them.

In Maharashtra, a substantial section of the Dalit vote supported the Congress. A strong Dalit movement enabled the Congress to incorporate Dalit symbols and concerns in order to mobilize the group. Yet again, the political discourse rested on the opposition to caste-based exclusion. As the Congress declined and rival political parties gained strength and office, these rival parties that may not have had Dalit support to begin with did not adopt a hostile position against the group. They did not reverse welfare policies. These political parties viewed Dalits as a future support base in a fragmenting party system. In these states, Dalits are not perceived as voiceless by political parties. As independent voters they are approached as a persuadable part of the electorate in a competitive electoral system. Political parties therefore take the view that suspending or reversing public policies harms present and future supporters. But why design these policies in the first place? Multiethnic parties in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have been more inclusive, especially at the base – these parties have

networks among the marginalized. This has made them more inclined towards designing pro-poor policies.

The welfare tendencies of the two movement states are best illustrated by two pro-poor programs: the mid-day meal scheme developed in Tamil Nadu and the employment guarantee scheme developed in Maharashtra.

In 1960, the Congress-run government in Tamil Nadu began to provide mid-day meals to elementary school children in districts with high concentrations of poor people. This program was later extended to all the districts in the state by the AIDMK government in 1982. The objective of the program was to expand school enrollment among children belonging to the poorest families as well as to improve student retention in schools. The program also aimed to reduce rates of malnutrition among school going children.<sup>63</sup> Since then, the program has been upgraded in scope and breadth. It has been widened to the secondary school level and there have been improvements in the caloric and nutritional content of the meals served. Tamil Nadu has recorded a rapid growth in its literacy rates and has also reduced child malnutrition.

In Maharashtra, the state government began the employment guarantee scheme (EGS) in 1970. The objective of the scheme was to guarantee at least 100 days of employment to the poorest households in the state. It began as a drought relief program, but was continued by the state government beyond the drought conditions that lasted only until 1973. The EGS not only increased the entitlement of the poor in the state, but also contributed towards reducing the poverty rate.<sup>64</sup> It is not a coincidence that these

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<sup>63</sup> The program has been found to be so successful that in 2001, the Indian Supreme Court ordered that it be extended to all the government-run schools across the country. It is the largest school-feeding program in the world feeding 120 million children in India every day.

<sup>64</sup> Given its successes in Maharashtra, in 2005, the EGS was launched across India's hundred most

two pioneering poverty alleviation programs appeared in the states of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra respectively. Rather, these programs reflect the movement-generated compulsion of political parties to respond to the material distress of the poor, including Dalits. In this sense, the centrality of parties in attaining these outcomes cannot be overemphasized. This is because parties run governments and are responsible for state policies. Yet, still, political parties behave differently across different states.

The above account should not mislead us into believing that the implementation of these programs is free of impediments. As discussed in the second chapter, the poor lack the means to hold the state accountable. Consequently, the implementation of many pro-poor policies, even in movement states, has remained flawed. For example, even as Dalit children received mid-day meals, they sometimes remained segregated in schools from children belonging to the dominant ethnic group (Akbar 1988: 99-100). Or take for instance the corruption in the EGS where the employment rolls have been known to be padded and the number of projects exaggerated to embezzle state funds (Echeverri-Gent 1995: 110-113). More often than not, neither the actual nor the potential beneficiaries of these public programs are in any position to protest the discrimination and corruption actively.

Without a similar history of movements, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Congress mobilized each caste group separately. The mobilization instead of being across ethnic cleavages remained along ethnic cleavages. The party was not inclusive at the base – it did not develop networks among the marginalized, and undermobilized the lower caste vote by not responding to their social deprivation. This then meant that poverty

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distressed districts. It has been extended to all the districts in the country in 2008.

alleviation programs were poorly designed and weakly implemented by state governments (Kohli 1989; Dube 1998). Furthermore, electoral democracy notwithstanding, the social discourse remained wedded to the preservation of the hierarchical social order to a far greater extent. Under the pressure of the national leadership, when the Congress in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar tried to implement pro-poor programs as a means of mobilizing the poor vote, these ran into bureaucratic and political resistance. The bureaucracy was largely drawn from the dominant ethnic groups and there was widespread apathy, even antipathy, towards uplift of Dalits and other lower castes.

Jaffrelot (2003) contends that the Congress Party's national leadership was able to widen the redistributive net in the northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to include Dalits only during the period of national emergency between 1975 - 1977, when routine democratic practices were suspended. He suggests it took the suspension of electoral politics for the party to override local resistance against state assistance to Dalits. Without state guarantees of protection against reprisals from the dominant castes, Dalits could not protest the failure of the program. Because they were largely perceived as a captive vote bank of the Congress Party, when Congress lost power, welfare policies benefiting Dalits were reversed.

In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress collapse and the rise of ethnic parties in the state since 1990 has been unable to reverse this trend of policy disruption. For example, in its three short tenures in the government between 1996 and 2005, the BSP implemented a series of policies targeted specifically at Dalits. Its flagship program was the Ambedkar Gram Vikas Yojana. Under this program, funds were allocated for public works in

villages where Dalits were more than 30 percent of the population. The party also distributed small plots of land and provided occupancy rights to lands that had been previously distributed to Dalits (Pai 2000). These welfare programs were suspended as soon as the government changed. Similarly, the BSP has discontinued targeted programs begun by other ethnic parties. These disruptions have increased wastage because very often projects are left incomplete at the moment the government collapses or is voted out. Moreover, these targeted policies divert funds from other public programs in the state.<sup>65</sup>

To recap, in movement states, Dalits could access multiple political identities and cross-group mobilization became possible. All parties perceived Dalits as potential supporters. As a result, welfare policies were economically targeted instead of being ethnically targeted. Moreover, policy disruption was less probable when governments changed. By contrast, in nonmovement states, Dalits were perceived as a captive vote bank of a particular party and they were mobilized along ethnic lines. As a result, ethnically targeted policies were more likely and policy reversal was more probable.<sup>66</sup>

It is important to emphasize that a large number of Dalits continue to live on the margins of society. Deprivation, both absolute and relative, social humiliation, and violence define their everyday existence. Yet within this band of marginalization there

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<sup>65</sup> Dalit representatives in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar counter this argument by pointing out that in the past, what are normally perceived as public services were in reality targeted services because the resources allocated for their provision to the lower orders were either siphoned off, or if the services were provided, the marginalized groups were denied access to them. Hence for these groups to play catch-up targeted policies are necessary.

<sup>66</sup> A number of scholars explain improvement in basic needs indicators through movements. Both Manali Desai (2003) and Ashutosh Varshney (2005) trace the success of class-based mobilization in Kerala and its impact in the form of the substantial reduction in poverty to the successful mobilization among lower castes. They argue that social inclusion of lower castes facilitated the mobilization of the poor as a collective and assisted in the construction of class politics.

exists a significant degree of variation in the outcomes related to their access to basic services across the four states. A key distinction exists between Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, on one hand, and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, on the other. The state, through its policies, has made a more concerted effort towards poverty alleviation and uplift of human development indicators in movement states. This is also reflected in the interview and focus group discussion responses. Problems related to voice notwithstanding, interview and focus group data point to the difference in the frequency and range of complaints among Dalit respondents between the two sets of states. Where Dalits had access to a larger basket of services, they had more to complain about. The Dalits in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra complained more about state neglect than those in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In these nonmovement states, there existed a greater sense of resignation about the issue of the poor delivery of public services.

The above analysis is substantiated by the evidence on indicators including literacy, drinking water, electricity, sanitation facilities, and infant mortality rate for the four states. Across all indicators, movement states possess better indicators than non movement states.

**Table 7.1a Indicators for Literacy (Percentages)**

<b>States</b>	<b>Dalits</b>	<b>All Groups</b>
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	46.3	57.3
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	63.2	73.4
<i>Bihar</i>	40.2	47.5
<i>Maharashtra</i>	71.9	77.2

Source: Census of India, 2001.

**Table 7.1b Indicators for Sanitation (Percentages)**

<b>States</b>	<b>Dalits</b>	<b>All Groups</b>
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	15.4	28.7
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	21.9	39.8
<i>Bihar</i>	15.2	22.4
<i>Maharashtra</i>	50.8	61.1

Source: Census of India, 2001.

**Table 7.1c Indicators for Electricity (Percentages)**

States	Dalits	All Groups
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	23.3	54.6
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	56.6	64.4
<i>Bihar</i>	22.2	46.3
<i>Maharashtra</i>	65.3	75.5

Source: Census of India, 2001.

**Table 7.1d Indicators for Drinking Water (Percentages)**

States	Dalits	All Groups
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	63.5	87.8
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	74.6	85.6
<i>Bihar</i>	59.2	65.8
<i>Maharashtra</i>	80.4	89.8

Source: Census of India, 2001.

**Table 7.1e Indicators for Infant Mortality Rate**

States	Dalits	All Groups
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	79	76
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	48	43
<i>Bihar</i>	60	56
<i>Maharashtra</i>	48	42

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India, 2003

The movement and nonmovement states also differ in one other respect. The number of people living below the poverty line is higher in the nonmovement states. Rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are endowed with soil conditions and irrigation resources that are significantly better than rural Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. We should therefore expect the gap in poverty rates to be far smaller than it is. This has not happened with the number of absolute poor in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra remaining lower. More significantly, the poor in these movement states are better supplied with public services as compared to their counterparts in the nonmovement states. The indicators for access to public services for Dalits living even in the affluent districts of the nonmovement states lag the state averages of the movement states.

**Tables 7.2 Variation in Poverty Rates across States across time**

States/ Social Categories	1987-88		1999-2000	
	Dalits	All Groups	Dalits	All Groups
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	65	47	44	31
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	48	46	33	26
<i>Bihar</i>	73	53	60	44
<i>Maharashtra</i>	63	41	33	28

Source: Statistics on Children in India, Hand Book 1998, National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development and Selected Socio Economic Statistics 2002, Central Statistical Organization, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Govt. of India & India Yearbook 2002, Manpower Profile.

In addition to type and regularity of policy, there is yet another factor that constrains improvements in basic indicators among the poor in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar – the ability of political parties to substitute symbolic ethnic goods with material goods. This factor is directly related to the differences in mobilization of Dalits across the two sets of states. With lower caste ethnic parties gaining power, the focus has shifted to the policies designed and implemented by these parties. To appreciate their policies fully, however, it is important to understand the significance of symbolic politics.

I draw an analytical distinction between symbolic and material goods. The spectrum of material goods ranges from roads and electricity, on one end, to literacy and healthcare, on the other. These enhance the capability of individuals and enable material survival and progress. Symbolic goods include public gestures such as slogans, protests, observances, the building of monuments, and the naming of public spaces like roads, railway stations, colleges, etc. Symbolic goods do not directly aid in material advancement, instead their appeal is emotional in nature. They are valuable because they hold meaning for the community. They are pure public goods for a group – their consumption is indivisible and all group members benefit from them.

The provision of symbolic and material goods is not mutually exclusive,

however, under budget constraints parties could substitute some symbolic goods for material goods and undersupply the latter. That said, this option of substituting symbolic goods for material goods is contingent on two conditions. First, symbolic ethnic goods must be scarce. The widespread availability of symbolic ethnic goods diminishes the return on their deployment, while scarcity of these goods resulting from social exclusion and invisibility increases the returns. Even when symbolic goods hold value and are desired, voters still seek material goods. For political parties to be able to use symbolic goods as substitutes for material goods instead of providing them as complimentary goods, a second condition must obtain. The second condition is that the decision on what to supply must rest primarily with the political party and not the voters. When voters have minimal control over parties, as is the case with marginalized voters' relationships with political parties, including their own ethnic party, they have little say in what the party provides.

In Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the ubiquity of symbolic politics, the social mobilization of Dalits, and their cultural assertion meant that the salience of caste-related symbolic goods has been in decline. Political parties have therefore relied more on programs that provide material goods and services than symbolic ethnic goods to obtain support of voters.

In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, weak and absent movements respectively, meant that there were few truly inclusive symbols in the public sphere. The Congress could have Dalit support delivered to it through the landed elite and later could get Dalit support even while undermobilizing the group, so it did not use Dalit symbols. Dalits remained alienated from the existing symbols because either these did not recognize

their history and experience, or in some instances were offensive to their quest for recognition. While in office, ethnic parties representing marginalized groups have relied on the provision of both symbolic and material goods to their supporters. These parties and their leadership resort to symbolic politics to mark group assertion and signal empowerment. The BSP, for example, has committed a significant amount of scarce public resources to symbolic politics. It has installed thousands of statues of Ambedkar across Uttar Pradesh. It has built monuments, parks, and renamed avenues and districts after major Dalit leaders in the country (Mishra 2007). Leaders of ethnic parties also turn themselves into symbols by actively engaging in the politics of spectacle.

For instance, provocative slogans used by the BSP and RJD, Lalu Yadav's emphasis on his rustic mannerisms and public reprimands of upper caste bureaucrats, and Mayawati's elaborate birthday parties mark a significant shift in the status quo as far as the formerly excluded and invisible are concerned. These embody empowerment because they are perceived as new freedoms among these groups and are valued by them.<sup>67</sup> Political parties have therefore succeeded in effectively using symbolic politics to establish their credibility. Seen purely from the standpoint of economic development, the expenditure of resources and time on symbolic ethnic goods may appear wasteful, however, it does dramatically address the complete invisibility of the marginalized in the public sphere.

Heterogeneity is regarded as detrimental to the provision of public services and welfare policies (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Alesina and Glaeser 2004).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> It is worth emphasizing these are not new freedoms. In fact, more often than not they are the freedoms they have enjoyed in principle, but not in practice.

<sup>68</sup> Given that both the United States and Europe are democratic, possess common cultural and religious roots, and are similarly wealthy, Alesina and Glaeser ask why the welfare policies that redistribute wealth

Economists point out that trade requires trust, public goods sometimes need collective action, and the rule of law is only feasible if everyone accepts the rights of others. It is hypothesized that since more contact within a homogenous population builds trust, it contributes to the creation of a sense of community which then produces beneficial outcomes. In heterogeneous societies similar benefits do not arise. One may read these works and ask: Are heterogeneous societies doomed? The above discussion suggests that those outcomes may not always be bleak. It points out that when it comes to the distribution of public goods, the composition of a society may impinge, yet it does not necessarily bind. By comparing welfare outcomes across heterogeneous societies, it identifies political mechanisms that account for beneficial and adverse outcomes for welfare policies.

### ***Conclusion***

My work has tried to show that the literatures on ethnic participation and mobilization must take note of marginalization because it impacts why people participate and how they are mobilized. In the case of Dalits, the decision to vote is not explained by SES-based, patronage-based, or civic duty -based motivations, instead it is embedded in their ad hoc relations with the Indian state and in some cases in their subordinate relations with other groups.

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from the rich to the poor much are more limited in the United States in comparison with continental Europe. They find that differences in political institutions rooted in different histories in the first half of the twentieth century partly account for the difference. The remaining difference is explained by differences in ethnic heterogeneity between the two places. Since the US is racially and ethnically more heterogeneous than Europe, class identity found it more difficult to take root in the state. Additionally, social attitudes among the majority white community have remained hostile towards welfare because welfare policies were perceived as disproportionately benefiting the Blacks and come to the conclusion that heterogeneity has an adverse impact on public policy. Alisina, Baqir, and Easterly (1999) study the impact of ethno-linguistic divisions on the provision of public goods across US cities.

Patterns of Dalit mobilization illustrate how the typical prerequisites – possession of franchise and even numerical strength of a group – may sometimes not be enough for a party to acknowledge the concerns of that group fully, even as the same party relies on the group's electoral support. Unless marginalized groups mobilize on their own, their needs are unlikely to turn into demands that the political process will incorporate. In this sense, the marginalized can remain undermobilized while participating in the democratic process.

This is why we must reevaluate the conventional wisdom on ethnic parties. Within the current literature, ethnic parties are identified as the harbingers of problems. They are particularly held responsible for economic distortions and for deepening ethnic conflict. While my own work substantiates these concerns, it also points to an equally important contribution made by some ethnic parties. Those ethnic parties that mobilize marginalized groups, especially, bring new voters into the political process. They mobilize voters who have previously not been mobilized or who have been undermobilized by political parties. They represent symbolic citizenship for groups that are invisible in society. And, they represent demands that have remained ignored within the political process – all valuable contributions in their own right.

The pattern of Dalit mobilization also reveals another important relationship between two distinct forms of mobilization – social and electoral mobilization. Ethnic movements are considered foundational to the success of an ethnic party. By comparing states that historically experienced the rise of movements challenging social hierarchy with those that did not, I am able to demonstrate that there does not exist a direct link between the social and electoral mobilization of a marginalized group. When the social

mobilization of a marginalized group precedes its electoral mobilization, the success of the group's ethnic party is curtailed. The ethnic party is unable to translate strong ethnic consciousness into electoral success. In the case of Dalits, as I show, a prior ethnic movement has actually limited the success of the ethnic party during the period of opportunity, that is party system fragmentation. At the same time, an absent or weak prior movement has enabled ethnic party success during the period of party system fragmentation.

My research also demonstrates that all ethnic mobilization is not the same and should not be treated as such. The opportunities and constraints and indeed the reasons for mobilization of a marginalized group are distinct from other groups. Black mobilization during the civil rights movement, the indigenous people's movements in parts of Latin America, the movements of the Burakumin in Japan, and the mobilization of Dalits in India is centered on ethnicity. So, too, are anti-immigrant mobilization in Europe and the United States and the Hindu nationalist mobilization against Muslims in India. But should these be equated? This work illustrates why they should not. The groups in the former cases of mobilization mobilize for social and political equality, while in the latter cases mobilization occurs in order to exclude another group. Further still, the constraints that marginalized groups face against mobilization and the opportunities available to them, are very different. These are important distinctions and must be acknowledged fully in the literature.

We must also continue to broaden the set of motivations that draw people to movements and political parties. Politics is much more than a struggle for resources alone. There are other motivations besides resources that bring citizens into politics.

Often how people are treated by fellow citizens and the state influences how they relate to political institutions. The research presented in this dissertation finds that the search for dignity and recognition is an important motivation for mobilization.

**Appendix A:**  
**Focus Group Methodology**

I draw on survey data from the 2004 round of the Indian National Election Study (NES), conducted immediately after the last national elections, however, the bulk of my evidence is culled from focus group discussions and open-ended interviews conducted during the same period and after state assembly elections held in subsequent years.

I conducted twenty focus groups each, across the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Maharashtra. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from 12 to 15. Each focus group discussion lasted from an hour and half to two hours. I tabulated all the responses of the participants. In the chapters, however, I only report modal responses to my questions. Modal responses have content that appeared most frequently in the discussions.

The focus group discussions with Dalit voters were centered on the following questions: What problems regarding basic services did they face in their area? Did they face caste-based discrimination in their area? Who did they turn to for assistance?

Why did they go to vote? Which party did they support? Why did they support that particular party?

In both urban and rural areas, I was comfortable selecting localities instead of households. Neighborhoods and localities are good proxies for income levels and caste status in rural and urban (especially the small towns) India. In both these settings, there exists segregation along class lines and very often along caste lines, too. Within a given locality there may be household income differentials within a certain range, but I have assumed attitudes are similar within this range. Dalit localities are separate from localities of other castes both in rural and in urban areas. Across all four states and the districts I conducted my fieldwork in, a minority of Dalits belong to the upper and middle income category, so I oversampled on poor Dalit localities. Similarly, I also oversampled on rural localities, since this is where a majority of Dalits still reside.

I decided to use focus groups as an instrument for gathering data for a variety of reasons. I wanted to collect data on a fairly specific range of voter behavior – why voters go to vote on the day of polling and how they choose parties. An interaction confined to a moderated discussion around select questions with the study participants allowed me to generate the necessary information on the questions I was researching. In this respect, the focus group data supplemented both survey data and the information generated through participant observations. On most days, politics is not the primary preoccupation of most citizens. Consequently, the process of gathering public opinion is

fraught with problems of acquiring accurate and reliable information. Since during a focus group, the opinions emerge from a discussion, they are likely to be more considered and deliberated upon than the survey-based opinion data. Furthermore, the focus group method (as compared to something like participant observation) allows the researcher to replicate the questions across different areas to test the robustness of findings. For the findings from the focus groups to be considered unbiased and valid, the process was replicated across different localities. I selected on large Dalit localities – two-hundred households or more – for the focus group discussions, interviews and surveys. Additionally, within a locality, individuals were contacted to participate using the stratified random sampling method.

The focus group discussions were further supplemented with open-ended interviews in each locality to check for the validity of the responses obtained during the discussions. The questions related to choice of party selection were administered in a private setting.

Like other subaltern groups, there are limited accounts of the democratic participation and mobilization of Dalits. The popular press and histories have poorly documented their political behavior. Focus groups proved to be a useful instrument to partially address this information gap. They were used to collect oral histories on issues related to the political participation and mobilization of Dalits.

For the study to be able to gather data on the treatment of Dalits by members of other groups and state officials, it was essential for the respondents to trust me. Collective participation in the discussion in response to questions and collective vetting of the project during the focus group facilitated the building of this trust.

A survey team typically spends a limited time in the locality where surveys are conducted. On the other hand, an anthropologist usually confines his or her study to a neighborhood or a village. The nature of my data demanded I spend more time in a locality than a surveyor, yet the scope of my work required that I could not achieve the level of in-depth knowledge which an anthropologist is able to extract from a locality. I personally conducted all the focus groups and I visited each locality at least twice in the process of conducting the interviews and the focus group. I made sure that all the questions on the project raised before and after the discussions and interviews were answered. This was done specifically to build trust with my respondents. I was an outsider in these localities and it was important for their residents to be able to vet the project thoroughly and to interact with me with more confidence.

There were some challenges, however, that I was not able to overcome. The sample of participants in the focus group discussions and open-ended interviews is heavily biased in favor of men in some of the states. In urban areas, both men and women participated in focus groups. In rural areas across all the localities, the participation of women was limited. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar it was negligible, whereas in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra women participated in greater numbers in the

rural areas. In the two former states, I was not allowed to talk to women in the rural areas (with the exception of the very old women). In some urban and rural localities, the focus groups were conducted separately with men and women. In the future extension of this study, I plan to conduct interviews and discussions, especially in rural areas, with the help of women researchers. This should improve access to rural women.

A reasonable question may be raised about the validity of focus group data: Does it privilege group opinion over individual opinion, and does it allow me to draw inferences on voting behavior which is essentially an individual act? I have a three part response to this question. First, anthropologists and sociologists working on India suggest that in rural India individuals often gather political information through group discussions. My observations also confirm this finding. In this sense, individual opinion is already contaminated by group opinion. Second, I did take the precaution of conducting open-ended interviews to supplement the focus group discussions. Finally, I use focus group findings in conjunction with findings of the National Election Study surveys.

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