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Deviant Democratization in India[1]

ALISTAIR MCMILLAN

India is not only the world's most populous democracy, it is also a 'deviant' democracy. The success of its democratic transition and consolidated democracy has puzzled many scholars of democratization. This paper sets out the grounds for Indian democratic exceptionalism in relation to key explanations of democratization. It goes on to examine the period of democratic transition, and in particular the background to independence, the influence of British colonial rule, the adoption of the constitution in 1950, and the role of the army. Finally, it looks at the process of democratic consolidation, attempting to explain the development of democratic institutions and practices. It highlights the special role of the ideology and leadership of India's premier party, the Indian National Congress (INC), without being blind to the shadow sides of its long reign.

Key words: democratization; India; democratic consolidation; democratic transition

Introduction

India is food for thought for scholars interested in democratization. The country does not fit into mainstream theoretical and empirical explanations for democracy, constituting the everlasting exception. As Ian McLean put it when studying explanations of worldwide democratization:

> The exclusion of India is an infuriating and inexplicable feature of the work not only of some historical sociologists, who at least have the excuse of saying 'it is not one of my cases', but also of some statistical generalizers. It is hard to see how a generalization that excludes half of all the people in the world who live in a democracy can have much validity.[2]

India clearly is a deviant case, as defined in this special issue,[3] since the circumstances under which democratization took place in this country were certainly not favourable. On the basis of established expectations from the leading theoretical and empirical democratization literature, democracy in India is quite unexpected. Still, despite all this, India managed not only to make a transition to democracy, but also to consolidate its new democratic regime.

India's deviant democracy certainly deserves more attention, even if it has been an academic brainteaser already for a long time. As Arend Lijphart noted, 'India has long been a puzzle for students of comparative democratic politics.'[4] He points out that the successful maintenance of democracy has confounded expectations that a system would be unsustainable in the light of the widespread

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poverty and illiteracy and such pronounced ethnic and linguistic diversity. Sixty years on from independence, Indian democracy is robust and vibrant, and satisfies the conditions for democratic consolidation: 'the most surprising and important case of democratic endurance in the developing world'.[5]

This paper sets out the grounds for Indian democratic deviancy. It describes India's exceptionalism in relation to the explanations of democratization that have been dominant in the literature. It goes on to examine the period of democratic transition, and in particular the background to independence, the influence of British colonial rule, the adoption of the constitution in 1950, and the specific character and role of the army. Finally, it looks at the process of democratic consolidation, and attempts to explain the development of democratic institutions and practices.

Indian Exceptionalism and Democratization

Democratization was an unexpected development in India. Theoretical and empirical expectations would certainly not connect India with democracy. In this sense, India is a so-called 'deviant democracy'.[6] This section aims to discuss the nature and the level of its deviancy.

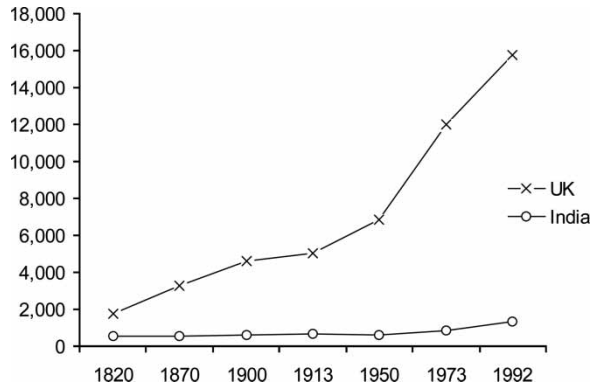
India clearly is a deviant case on the basis of modernization theory.[7] To be more precise, India stands out in terms of economic disadvantage, crucial in relation to Lipset's classic formulation that 'the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy'.[8] This hypothesis has been reinforced in numerous studies, with Barbara Geddes concluding: 'One of the few stylized facts to emerge from studies of regime transition is that democracy is more likely in more developed countries.'[9] She suggests that the positive relationship has been established 'beyond reasonable doubt'.

Despite possible methodological confusion over the study of democratic transition and consolidation (and arguments over whether India is still transitional or consolidated), it is clear from Figure 1 that a positive relationship between democratization and economic performance is unlikely to explain democratization in India. On the basis of the low level of economic development in India, a transition to democracy in this country would be improbable – let alone the consolidation of that democracy. In this sense, Indian democracy clearly is a deviant case.

In addition to economic development, India displayed low levels of education and urbanization during the period in which it democratized (Table 1). Urbanization and literacy have been taken for proxies of modernization, and such low levels were not seen to bode well.[10] More recent analysis, such as Vanhanen's study,[11] interpret low levels of education and urbanization as signalling inequalities in power resources, which are associated with low levels of democratic performance. Whilst Vanhanen's method of testing democratization against the diffusion of power resources is dubious, he does find that India is far more democratic than would be expected.[12]

The size and diversity of Indian society can be seen as another obstacle to explaining successful democratization. James Manor describes India as 'the most heterogeneous and complex society on earth',[13] reflecting the religious, linguistic, and social cleavages that exist. Comparative studies of ethno-linguistic fractionalization

FIGURE 1
GDP PER CAPITA (IN 1990 US INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS) OVER TIME



Source: Angus Maddison, 'Income Growth, Income Gaps, and the Ranking of Nations', in Mitchell A. Seligson and John T. Passé-Smith (eds), *Development and Underdevelopment: The Political Economy of Global Inequality* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998), pp. 21–22, Table 3.2.

place India at the highest end of the scale. Using a standard Index of Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization, India scores 89. Only Zaire has a higher score – 90 – in a study of 67 countries. Using a more sophisticated Social Diversity Index, India scores 0.98, on a scale of 0 to 1 with a mean of 0.79.[14] In other words, these data show beyond doubt that India is characterized by many strong religious, linguistic, and social divisions in its society.

Adam Przeworski et al.'s study *Democracy and Development*, which models the relationship between economic development and the status of political regimes (including measures of per-capita income, religious and linguistic diversity, and

TABLE 1
INDIAN DEMOGRAPHICS, 1901–1971

	Population (m)	Annual population growth rate (%)	Literacy rate	Urban population (%)
(A)				
1901	280.87	0.11	6.2	10.0
1911	298.20	0.65	7.0	9.4
1921	299.63	0.09	8.3	10.2
1931	332.29	1.05	9.2	11.1
1941	382.56	1.41	15.1	12.8
(B)				
1951	360.2	1.23	–	17.3
1961	439.0	2.00	24.0	18.0
1971	561.0	2.3	29.4	19.9

Notes: Figures for period (A) cover Indian subcontinent, excluding Burma, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province. Period (B) covers India proper.
Source: B.R. Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 4, Table 1.1.

proximity to other democracies), predicted India as a dictatorship for the whole post-war period. They note that '(t)he odds against democracy in India were extremely high'.[15] Lijphart notes that the likelihood of India being able to have an effective system of power-sharing was hindered both by the size of the total population and the presence of such a large number of groups.[16]

India's transition to democracy was also very unlikely because it took place in a period of national independence struggles worldwide. Yet, although this was the most significant period of postcolonialism, only few of the postcolonial states developed into democracies, let alone stable democracies. In fact, during most of its period of democratic transition and consolidation, India was surrounded by authoritarian regimes, ranging from various military juntas in Bangladesh, Burma, and Pakistan, through the absolute monarchy in Nepal, to the communist regime in China. Even today, India is the only major stable democracy in the whole of South Asia.

Despite poverty, illiteracy, being a largely agrarian society and having authoritarian neighbours, India implemented a democratic constitution in 1949, and held elections, based on universal franchise, in 1951–1952. These were considered to be free and fair. The basic institutions for democratic representation and accountability, or the framework of a polyarchy, were entrenched. India has, since 1947, largely conformed to Robert Dahl's prescription for the institutional requirements for democratic process.[17] Democratic politics in India has seen open and competitive elections, in which participation is widespread and orderly transitions take place between government and opposition.

These statements must be qualified, however, in a number of respects. Most prominently, the 'Emergency' period of 1975–1977 saw the postponement of elections and the suspension of many civil and political liberties. During this period, Indira Gandhi – who was not only prime minister and leader of the Congress government but also daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, who oversaw the formative years of India's democratic independence – suspended elections and imprisoned political opponents. These actions during the 'Emergency' period mark an undeniable failure in the practice of democracy in India. It can be justified as a constitutional interregnum, legitimized by the parliament and the courts, but it was clearly an authoritarian interlude. In terms of academic analysis, the 'Emergency' has meant that India was relegated to the status of a transient democracy.[18]

There have also been situations where regional disturbances have meant that democratic practices have been suspended, at least regionally. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir electoral politics have largely been a sham, with outcomes determined through negotiations between the central government and regional leaders. Conflicts in the Punjab, Assam, and across the North-Eastern region have also led to short-term restrictions on political liberties and the cancellation of elections.[19]

There have been further concerns raised about more general political liberties: the extent to which central governments have interfered in the running of state governments; the extent to which central governments have controlled information provided by *Doordarshan*, the state-run broadcaster (less of a problem since the 1990s, due to the proliferation of alternative media outlets); and the prevalence of political violence.[20]

Violent communal mobilizations have continued to take place, notably after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, and in Gujarat in 2002. Politicians have continued to instigate communal tension for electoral gain. In many aspects, the political system is ineffective, unaccountable, and unresponsive. Delivery of government programmes is generally poor, and has done little to alleviate the problems of the poorer and marginalized sections of society. Whilst trust in the institutions of the democratic state is high, assessments of politicians, political parties, government officials, and the police are much lower.[21]

Still, despite all these problems, India is cited widely as a successful democracy, as indeed it is. Democracy in India was – and still is – very unlikely and unexpected, and hence it is obvious that the country can be classified as a deviant democracy. Few people who witnessed the birth of independent India could have imagined that this poor country with a largely illiterate population, completely surrounded by non-democratic neighbouring countries, could make a transition to democracy. That this has been achieved, against all odds, is remarkable and certainly needs more explanation, which will be the task of the next section.

Colonialism and India's Transition to Democracy

Indian independence and the institution of democratic government emerged after a long process of nationalist confrontation with British colonial rule. Not surprisingly, the nature of Indian democratization was clearly shaped by this confrontation. Nonetheless, the influence of British colonial rule on the Indian transition to democracy has been contested by several scholars. According to Sumit Ganguly, for example,

> the British did little or nothing to promote the growth of democratic institutions in India. ... Indian nationalists can justifiably claim that each step toward self-rule and democratic governance was the result of sustained and unrelenting political agitation by Indians against authoritarian colonial rule.[22]

Yet the British colonial powers did establish systems of administration which were easily adapted to democratic politics, incorporated Indians into the running of government, and laid the foundations of a representative system of government.[23]

The colonial system in India depended on a combination of autocratic enforcement and popular consent, as the British Raj attempted to reconcile the traditions of British liberalism and British imperialism.[24] The Indian National Congress (INC) exploited (and members often suffered from) the inconsistencies and tensions between these two strands of British policy. In Mahatma Gandhi, Congress had a leader who was adept at exposing the contradictions of colonial rule, and unsurpassed at devising forms of protest which used weakness and vulnerability to expose injustice and falsity.

The INC, established in 1885, evolved under Gandhi's leadership from an elite to a mass political movement with a broad base, and with an inclusive ideology that sought to reach out to all members of Indian society. Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence and personal commitment to an ideal of *swaraj*, or self-rule, reflected

a concern with wider social emancipation, rather than a narrow constitutional focus for the nationalist movement. This led to a mixture of different strategies which challenged British colonial rule in various ways. Mass protests, such as the non-co-operation movement of 1920–1922 and the civil disobedience movement of 1930–1931, were curtailed when they threatened to provoke widespread violent confrontation. They were interspersed with Gandhi's personal protests: hunger strikes and his famous salt *satyagraha* in 1930. The INC under Gandhi mixed cooperation and negotiation over the process of constitutional reform with outright challenge to British rule.

As early as 1881, the British Viceroy could claim that 'it would always be an aim worthy of the English Government in India to train the people over whom it rules more and more as time goes on to take an intelligent share in the administration of their own affairs'.[25] Alongside a system of autocratic rule, a process of accommodation operated which sought to incorporate Indian expertise. This process led to the 1909 Morley–Minto reforms, which first established legislative councils, and the 1919 Montagu–Chelmsford reforms, which sought 'the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'.[26] These reforms introduced elections to the Indian system of government, although with a severely restricted franchise, and with safeguards built in to guarantee representation for particular groups.

As well as setting up a limited form of electoral politics, and using a variety of electoral systems, the reforms introduced under colonial rule established a mode of formal political interaction. Each reform was preceded by an elaborate system of consultation, where committees would take evidence from around British India. Evidence was taken from representatives of a plethora of societies, each claiming to speak for a particular sub-section of Indian society. From the records of these consultations it appears that India had, at the turn of the 20th century, a rich associational life. Whether these associations had any wider support was never tested, but the system of group consultation and rewards provided the basis for the British colonial system of representation.

The concessions made by the British rulers were tainted by the accusation that they were motivated by a strategy of 'divide and rule'. Gita Subrahmanyam argues that the British administration manufactured and politicized social tension in order to 'justify British autocracy as necessary for maintaining social stability and effective control'.[27] However, the British reformers were not always the ones who pressed for communal electorates, and the Lucknow Pact between Congress and the Muslim League supported the continuance of the policy in 1916.

The elections under colonial rule may have been carried out on the basis of a severely restricted franchise; they still provided interesting dynamics and patterns of party competition. Congress support varied across the provincial legislatures, showing that it was not a movement that garnered uniform support. Alternative parties, such as the Justice Party in Madras and the Unionist Party in the Punjab, competed for electoral spoils. And it was Congress's success in vanquishing such parties

in the elections following the 1935 Government of India Act, expanding legislative powers and the electorate, which demonstrated its mass support: 'Congress in 1937 palpably demonstrated that it now possessed the political allegiance of very large numbers of India's peasant population (and not only those who had been granted the vote).'[28]

Independence for India arrived amidst the trauma of partition, during which some 500,000 people were killed and some 11 million Hindus and Muslims relocated across the hastily drawn borders.[29] The 'two nations' policy of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, had been introduced into the constitutional negotiations as a means of pressing for effective Muslim autonomy and veto power over a potentially majoritarian Hindu state.[30] However, no effective institutional models could be designed which satisfied both Muslim demands for protection and the INC's acceptance of a liberal democratic foundation for the new state. The federal mode of government, outlined in the 1935 Government of India Act, had not been implemented, and communal electorates were seen as polarizing representation, rather than offering any real protection. The crude and bloody surgery of partition was an unsatisfactory course for all the key protagonists in the move towards independence, but no other direction could be agreed upon.[31]

Partition had further consequences for independent India. The Constituent Assembly, overseeing the drawing up of the Independent Constitution for India, was now completely dominated by the INC. Representatives of the areas designated as part of Pakistan were removed from the process; some were brought back into the Assembly through Congress generosity. In these circumstances the Congress was in complete control of the process of constitution-building, and it moved swiftly. Calls for minority protection on the basis of religion were rejected, and protection for 'untouchables' and tribal groups only reluctantly conceded, on the basis of their socio-economic backwardness.[32] The constitutional framework incorporated elements from the Nehru Report, notably universal franchise, with the executive structure modelled on that laid down in the 1935 Government of India Act. The influence of the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, B. R. Ambedkar, a bitter opponent of Gandhi and Congress elected in 1946 from Bengal with the support of Muslim leaders and brought back into the Assembly by Congress, can be seen in the incorporation of a section of fundamental rights, based on the American Bill of Rights.

Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal[33] argue that Congress's role in the democratization of India has been overstated, suggesting that it was the close relationship between the Congress leadership and the bureaucracy that determined the nature of the transition from colonialism. The smooth bureaucratic transition from the colonial to the democratic state provided the means for executive control in India, occasionally at the expense of democratic accountability. Bose and Jalal contrast this smooth transition with the situation in Pakistan, where the chaotic construction of new state structures led to instability and the eventual dominance of the military and bureaucratic state.[34] However, such a view underestimates the importance of the organization and ideology of the INC, and the way in which it was able to adapt the colonial framework to the new requirements of an independent India and of democratic practices.

The influence of Congress in shaping Indian democratization can be seen both in the ways in which it both used an inclusive ideology to establish democratic norms and adapted the British administrative framework to modify institutional structures and priorities. In Mohandas K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the INC provided a combination of symbolic and practical leadership.[35] As Ashutosh Varshney notes, '(t)he Congress party under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru not only protested British rule, but also turned locally and regionally oriented folk into Indians'.[36]

The role of the military has often been a source of destabilization in the process of democratization. In India the incorporation of the military into the administrative, but not the political domain, was essential to the successful transition to democracy. This was helped by the fact that the Indian state, which was formed after partition, coincided with the established military structure; a situation not shared in Pakistan, where a totally new military infrastructure had to be developed. As well as a relatively smooth administrative transition to civilian control of the military administration, the nationalist ethos of Congress was shared by the highest ranks of the military.

Field Marshal Cariappa (First Commander in Chief) sought to combine British abhorrence of 'politics in the mess' with promotion of the new nationalism. His instructions were clearly set out:

> – Politics in the Army is a poison. Keep off it. But as citizens of India you must know, only know, about it.
> – [The] Army is there to serve the Government of the day, and we should make sure that it does not get mixed up with party politics.
> – A soldier is above all politics and should not believe in caste or creed. As to myself, I am an Indian, and to the last breath would remain an Indian. For me there are only two STHANS, Hindusthan and Foujistan [the Army].
> – At all times, in everything you do and say, be an INDIAN first and Indian always. DO NOT disintegrate the country into little 'penny-packets' of your own class, your community or your religion.[37]

The military thus fitted into the system of parliamentary government. There were organizational reasons for its quiescence: navy, army, and air force officers were kept separate at all but the most senior levels; they were kept busy incorporating the princely states and dealing with the troubles in Jammu and Kashmir. Yet, as James Manor points out, 'the decisive reason for the restraint of the Indian military has been the success of civilian institutions'.[38]

Congress was able to draw in public figures from outside the party, such as B. R. Ambedkar, who had opposed the Congress because of its attitude towards untouchables. This illustrated the concessions granted by Congress to socially disadvantaged groups in society. For the untouchables, constituting some 15 per cent of Indian society, everyday rural life involved menial labour and social exclusion. For the tribal populations, some eight per cent of the population, exclusion was on more of a geographical basis. Congress reached out to these groups in a number of ways. The Gandhian ideology preached equality and a reform of hierarchical social practices, which had a rhetorical appeal. This was combined with a policy

of co-option, whereby leaders from these social groups, who built up any political support base, were absorbed into the Congress machine. And finally, the granting of legislative reservation meant that there were a certain proportion of untouchables and tribals in each legislature, albeit chosen by the electorate at large.

The importance of the Indian nationalist ideology for the achievement of independence can be further illustrated by examining the incorporation of the so-called princely states. There were more than 500 of such territories, comprising 40 per cent of the area of the subcontinent, and a third of its population. They had been kept in a state of neglect by the British since 1858, and, until the late 1930s, seen as outside the range of the Congress movement. In the Round Table Conferences of the early 1930s, the princely states aligned themselves with the Conservative die-hards, in an attempt to preserve the status quo. For a time, they believed that they could hold the balance of power in a confederal system. However, the onrush of independence in the 1940s saw them swept away, merged ruthlessly into the surrounding provinces. The only resistance came from two of the largest: Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir.[39] The accession of the princely states, and, more importantly, the lack of any significant resistance from the population of these states, illustrated the strength of the Indian national ideal. The INC inherited the remnants of a British colonial state that had been governed largely at the provincial level, along with a mixed bunch of princely states, but imposed a common ethos which overrode regional sentiments.

The institutional structures of the British Raj formed the administrative basis of independent India. The military, police, and civil administration were maintained with basically the same organizational and functional role in the government. However, the role of the Indian Nationalist Congress was crucial in adapting these institutions to the new democratic system, and the changed boundaries of the Indian state. The ethos of Indian nationalism provided an essential consolidating ideology, replacing the authority of the colonial state. In a similar way, the colonial administration provided a framework for representative government, through the institution of provincial elections and representative government. However, it was the success of the Congress leadership in expanding, adapting, and entrenching electoral politics and the democratic ethos that provided the grounds for successful democratization.

In short, two main crucial factors can be identified in order to explain India's unexpected transition to democracy. The first is the ideology and organization of the Indian nationalist movement; the second is the administrative and representative framework established by the British rulers. India was completely surrounded by authoritarian regimes and democratized as an important exception in the region, so in this sense its transition to democracy was remarkable and 'deviant', and certainly not expected on the basis of established theories. However, non-geographical diffusion effects (through the influence of the former British colonial power) clearly played a role by providing the administrative and representative framework for the new independent Indian state.[40] The next section will explain the consolidation of India's democracy, which was both surprising and unexpected, given the unfavourable structural circumstances.

From Transition to Consolidation

India was not only a deviant case during its transition to democracy, but also during the subsequent period of its consolidation. There have been a number of attempts to explain the pattern of democratic consolidation in India in terms of the institutional development of the state, and of how the Indian state has reacted to challenges to its legitimacy and authority.

Lijphart[41] argues that the explanation for the success of Indian democratic consolidation lies in the way ostensibly majoritarian democratic institutions have tended to accommodate, rather than override, challenges from regional, religious, and linguistic protest movements. Whilst the INC achieved electoral dominance in the post-independence elections, the party and Prime Minister Nehru did not use this dominance to override opposition. Instead, 'the Congress system has served as the foundation for a consociational grand coalition'.[42] This willingness to share power, rather than impose majoritarian policies, is put down to factors such as 'prudent and constructive leadership', the socio-economic diversity of India, successful linguistic federalism, and traditions of compromise and accommodation which foster consociationalism.[43] Lijphart recognizes that his interpretation of Indian consociationalism is not fully entrenched, and notes the destabilizing threat of the more autocratic leadership under the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi, a federal framework which has been vulnerable to central interference, and political challenges to minority accommodation. Yet he argues that consociational politics has endured in practice, and ensured the stability of democratic government.

The lack of formally consociational institutions in India – with no provision for proportional representation, no minority vetoes, and weak entrenchment of federalism – have led to criticism of Lijphart's argument. Steven Wilkinson[44] disputes Lijphart's reading of Indian political history, suggesting that the constitutional framework was a lot closer to the consociational model prior to independence, that is, under British rule. He notes that quotas for religious and caste groups were much more firmly entrenched in the provincial governments and legislatures established from the 1920s. What has been painted as a policy of 'divide and rule', directed at undermining Congress's political dominance, can be seen, in this interpretation, as a roughly consociational method of reducing ethnic and religious tension through a range of constitutional mechanisms to ensure minority representation in a range of governmental bodies.

Wilkinson goes on to argue that Lijphart's account of Indian post-independence politics strongly overstates the willingness of Nehru and the INC to share power. The Congress Party was strongly opposed to provisions based on group rights, and the limited constitutional recognition of special measures to ensure the representation of the 'scheduled castes', i.e. members of untouchable castes, and 'scheduled tribes', i.e. members from tribal or aboriginal groups, was only reluctantly conceded. Provisions to ensure the scheduled castes and tribes were proportionately represented in government employment were, again reluctantly, conceded by the INC, but not effectively implemented. Any extension of group rights to other 'backward' caste groups was fiercely resisted. Linguistic reorganization of the Indian federal system

was implemented from the 1950s, but again in the teeth of opposition from Nehru and the Congress leadership.[45]

Rather than consociational, Wilkinson argues that the post-independence Indian state managed ethnic and separatist movements in a repressive way, refusing to concede claims for minority rights that challenged the authority of the centre unless forced to do so. He suggests that the Congress system of the post-independence period is better characterized as a *control* state,[46] 'in which lower castes, religious minorities, and linguistic minorities within states were denied cultural rights and largely excluded from government jobs and political power'.[47]

Similarly, Katherine Adeney notes that whereas pre-independence institutions in India were designed to recognize national diversity through consociational and federal mechanisms, the constitution of independent India was essentially majoritarian. She argues that 'Nehru's politically inclusivist identity deliberately ignored ethnicity as a means of legitimizing the state, basing affiliation on a civic notion of territoriality'.[48] This found some institutional entrenchment in the federal structure of states, which emerged after 1956, but was only reluctantly conceded by Nehru.

The characterization of the Indian state as a consociational system of government does not live up to empirical scrutiny. In pre-independence India, the extent of representative government was so limited that any notion of power-sharing institutions in some democratic sense is inappropriate. The British rulers held the power, and the provincial legislatures and inclusion of Indians in executive bodies was largely a pragmatic response to the limited legitimacy of the colonial state and the need to operate a functioning administration. After independence, the INC dominated the Constitutional Assembly, and the constitution which emerged was based essentially on the majoritarian Westminster model. As a consequence, the former colonial power of the British rulers still had a big impact on Indian democracy; not only during the transition phase but, albeit more indirect, also during its consolidation. The Congress dominance of electoral politics from the 1950s provided little opportunity for effective parliamentary opposition. Whilst an essential element of the 'Congress system' of government was accommodation of a wide range of groups and opinions, and a willingness to recognize issues on which there seemed to be widespread discontent, this was only partial and on the Congress leadership's terms.

In his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore Jr. searched India in vain for the social upheaval which he associated with the struggle for democratic freedoms.[49] His account is suffused with indolent Hindus, hidebound by caste and village conventions, whose only effort is to prevent any agricultural surplus being diverted into industrial production. Atul Kohli notes:

> For nearly four decades now democracy in India has appeared somewhat of an anomaly. India is a multinational, agrarian society with a rigid and hierarchical social structure. The existence in such a setting of periodic elections, constitutional government, and freedom of expression and association has posed an intellectual puzzle.[50]

One answer to this puzzle is to examine the process by which the Congress Party developed political linkages. In terms of its impact on the rural economy and social

structures, Congress was conservative rather than radical. This pattern was evident from its role in the provincial governments established under British rule:

> Once in office, most Congress ministers and legislators performed impressively in this new mode of politics. They shrewdly channeled patronage to powerful groups that had previously remained rather aloof from the struggle. The most important of these were the most formidable people in India, the landowning peasant cultivators that dominated village society in most regions .... As a result, many landowning peasants in rural areas began to see that if Congress took power in India, there would be tangible advantages for them.[51]

Katherine Adeney and Andrew Wyatt note: 'The party's accommodation of these classes was an important stabilising factor during the transition to universal suffrage.'[52] By incorporating the rural landowners, Congress adapted to, rather than sought to transform, the patterns of authority that were already present. In addition, it is important to emphasize the role of patronage as well. As Stuart Corbridge and John Harris describe, 'while it [the INC] was at this time an extraordinary amalgam of thorough-going opportunism and, at the level of the "High Command", of great idealism, its organizational strength depended ultimately on the distribution of patronage'.[53]

Although the distribution of patronage was initially dominated by the Congress machine, new parties emerged to challenge for the right to distribute the spoils of government. For Kanchan Chandra, the power of Indian officials to target government resources to particular individuals or groups of voters on a partisan basis, characterizes it as a 'patronage democracy'.[54] She argues that the size and partiality of the administration in democratic India provide a context in which politicians and political 'fixers' focus on mobilizing along ethnic lines, and voters respond to these cues in order to try to tap into the stream of government resources.

Chandra argues that such a conceptualization of Indian politics is not necessarily detrimental to democratic consolidation. Rather, in a competitive electoral arena, identities are mutable and manipulable. Moreover, 'where electoral outcomes can be transformed by political manipulation, we are less likely to see the permanent exclusion of minority groups and the destabilizing violence associated with permanent exclusion'.[55] This conception of Indian identity as fluid and subject to complex patterns of politicization and mobilization fits in with James Manor's analysis of the nature of ethnicity in politics in India. He suggests that:

> Because Indian society is so heterogeneous, and because the country and its population are so large, people there have a wide array of identities available to them. These include at least three different kinds of caste identities (*varna*, *jati*-cluster and *jati*), religious identities (including loyalties to sects within larger religious groups) and identifications with clans and lineages – as well as linguistic, class, party, urban/rural, national, regional, subregional and local identities, and sometimes varying types of 'tribal' identities too. ... As a result, tensions do not become concentrated along a single fault-line in society, and do not produce prolonged and intractable conflict – 'ethnic' or otherwise – that might tear democratic institutions apart.[56]

This analysis of the politicization of identity explains the competitiveness and volatility of modern Indian electoral politics. And, it gives an insight into the periodic outbreaks of communal violence. As Manor notes, one of the ways in which the Indian system has limited the spread of destabilizing and violent uprising, has been through the federal system, which has acted to 'quarantine and confine most severe conflicts within single regions'.[57]

The strength of the Indian federal system lies not in its constitutional entrenchment, which is weak and leaves residual and reforming power at the centre. The Nehruvian constitutional settlement provided for a strong centre, and state autonomy was constrained by limited fiscal autonomy and political interference, most ostensibly through the frequent imposition of 'president's rule'. However, from the 1950s, the centre was challenged through regional mobilization, notably through the agitation for the reorganization of the federation along linguistic lines. When effective electoral challenges emerged against Congress, they did so in a regionally segmented manner, with different parties and coalitions gaining power at the state level. Even in the 1990s, when the Hindu-nationalist Indian People's Party (BJP) emerged as a powerful national party, its support base was largely limited to a few major states and it expanded and gained power through alliances with a large number of state parties.[58]

Again, this can be explained in terms of the complex nature of Indian identity. Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, and Yogendra Yadav conceptualize this in terms of the 'state nation', where political institutions reflect multiple but complementary socio-cultural identities.[59] Indian voters are more likely to relate to state parties and politicians, yet this does not necessarily weaken the attachment to national unity and identification with central institutions.

In a system of electoral federalism, the state level has emerged as the main focus for party competition in Indian national elections, and national election results are increasingly the amalgamation of regional contests. This process has seen the weakening of Congress as the dominant national party, and the prevalence of national coalitions and electoral alliances.[60] The role of prime minister has also weakened, selected as convener of a government coalition rather than a dominant personality. These changes have led Subrata Mitra to describe a 'puzzle of political stability', 'explained by the existence of a relatively fair and effective electoral process, which has become an agent of the creation of a stable and legitimate political order'. The need to form effective alliances and coalitions has forced parties to 'concede, coalesce, compromise, and come to a consensus'.[61]

Conclusion

It is obvious that India is a 'deviant' democracy, and that the success of its democratic transition and consolidated democracy has puzzled many scholars of democratization. This paper outlined the level and nature of Indian deviancy, and explained the democratic exceptionalism of this country in relation to explanations of democratization. It can be concluded that the success of Indian democratization stems from its ability to adapt the framework of British colonial rule to the new demands of electoral politics. In this, the role of the Indian National Congress is seen as central. This is not

simply due to the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru, but also to the party's organizational and mobilizational strength and its inclusive ideology for Indian nationalism. The painful aftermath of partition saw Congress emerge as a strong advocate of representative democracy, able to put in place a constitution and establish the new boundaries and role of a unified state.

Congress proved flexible enough to accommodate a range of interests and sectional demands, but it did so from a position of electoral strength, garnered through its nationalist mandate and the workings of the majoritarian electoral system. The early years of democratic consolidation were controlled through a centralized state apparatus, which aimed to limit political appeals to segmented group interests. Whilst it responded to political agitations through a process of accommodation and often incorporation, this was hardly a process of power-sharing along the lines of a classic consociational model. Rather it pursued a programme of centralized economic development alongside an acceptance of local power structures and political patronage. This developed into a competitive mode of party politics, with multiple parties competing for ethnic group support, with the promise of government resources in return.

Democratic politics infused Indian socio-economic hierarchies with a new dynamic, providing new opportunities for mobilization and contestation. A society divided by numerous social cleavages – including language, religion, caste, tribe, region, and class – proved resistant to stable majority control. While blurring the lines of accountability and responsiveness, the political system provided most minority groups with some chance of democratic participation, and presented politicians incentives to seek broad social coalitions. Political competition became fragmented along regional lines, reflecting and reinforcing the federal structure of the Indian state, but without seriously undermining a basic acceptance of national institutions and legitimacy.

Whereas the size and heterogeneity of India could be seen as undermining its democratic potential, in this account these attributes are considered to have helped the system endure. Strong regional identities have framed an increasingly robust federation, and also provided a segmented electoral arena which has contained potentially destabilizing political turmoil. Ethnic heterogeneity and electoral politics have developed a dynamic tendency which has proved richly competitive, albeit volatile, fractured, and occasionally violent. The nature of patronage democracy has provided an incentive for widespread participation across social groups, although it can also be seen to undermine effective implementation of government programmes and the neutrality of the administration. Yet, despite the frailties of governmental performance, the Indian democratic system as a whole remains robust.

NOTES

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Conference on Deviant Democracies: Democratization Against All Odds, Leiden University, the Netherlands, 29–30 September 2006. The special issue editors have done a considerable amount of work (in terms of both substance and editing) to improve further versions and to make this article as it stands now. In particular, Renske Doorenspleet and Cas Mudde answered all queries from the journal editors and did all of the final editing. Finally, the quality of this paper benefited tremendously from comments by the conference participants as well.

2. Iain McLean, 'Democratization and Economic Liberalization: Which is the Chicken and Which is the Egg', *Democratization*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1994), p. 29.
3. See Renske Doorenspleet and Petr Kopecký, 'Against the Odds: Deviant Cases of Democratization', *Democratization*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2008).
4. Arend Lijphart, 'The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (1996), p. 258.
5. Larry Diamond, 'Introduction: Persistence, Erosion, Breakdown', in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds), *Democracy in Democratic Countries: Asia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1989), p. 1.
6. For more information about 'deviant cases' in this sense, see: Doorenspleet and Kopecký (note 3).
7. See for description of modernization theory: Doorenspleet and Kopecký (note 3). See also Chapter 5 in Renske Doorenspleet, *Democratic Transitions: Exploring the Structural Sources during the Fourth Wave* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).
8. Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (1959), p. 75.
9. Barbara Geddes, 'What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2 (1999), p. 117.
10. Lipset (note 8), p. 101.
11. Tatu Vanhanen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries* (London: Routledge, 1997).
12. Ibid., p. 143.
13. James Manor, 'Why Liberal and Representative Politics Emerged in India', *Political Studies*, Vol. 38 (1990), p. 459.
14. See Tade O. Okediji, 'The Dynamics of Ethnic Fragmentation: A Proposal for an Expanded Measurement Index', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (2005), p. 655, Tables 1 and 3.
15. Adam Przeworski, Michael E Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-being in the World, 1950–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 87.
16. Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 263.
17. Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 239.
18. Consequently, Arend Lijphart excluded India in his study *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), although he classified it as becoming a democracy in 1977, in his updated study *Patterns of Democracy* (1999). Similarly, Samuel Huntington places India in his 'third wave' of democratization, starting from the late 1970s. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).
19. Robert L. Hardgrave discusses the violent struggle in Assam, and conflict in the Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., 'India: The Dilemmas of Diversity', in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Platter (eds), *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 71–85. Subir Bhaumik presents an account of the situation in the North East which warns that the region may 'degenerate into another Bosnia and Colombia rolled into one, where ethnic hostility and free flow of narcotics, dependence on gun-power by the state and communities will distort the region's politics, society and economy beyond repair'. Subir Bhaumik, 'North-East India: The Evolution of a Post-Colonial Region', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 327.
20. Myron Weiner, *The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Sage, 1989).
21. Subrata Kumar Mitra, 'Effects of Institutional Arrangements on Political Stability in South Asia', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2 (1999), p. 423.
22. Sumit Ganguly, 'Introduction', in Sumit Ganguly, Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner (eds), *The State of India's Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. ix.
23. See, for instance, Meghnad Desai, 'Why Is India a Democracy?', in Meghnad Desai and Aitzaz Ahsan (eds), *Divided by Democracy* (New Delhi: Lotus Collection, 2005); Vicky Randall, 'Why Have the Political Trajectories of India and China Been Different?', in David Potter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh, and Paul Lewis (eds), *Democratization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 204–8; Richard Sisson, 'Culture and Democratization in India', in Larry Diamond (ed.), *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp. 29–58.
24. Ashutosh Varshney, 'Why Democracy Survives', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1998), p. 40.
25. Sir Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London: Duckworth, 1989), p. 867.

26. UK Government Command Paper 9109, *Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms* (London: HMSO, 1918).
27. Gita Subrahmanyam, 'Ruling Continuities: Colonial Rule, Social Forces and Path Dependence in British India and Africa', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2006), p. 87.
28. D. A. Low, 'Congress and "Mass Contacts", 1936–1937: Ideology, Interests, and Conflict Over the Basis of Party Representation', in Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpert (eds), *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 153.
29. Hardgrave (note 19), p. 71.
30. Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal describe the deliberate ambiguity of Jinnah's proposals for a constitutional settlement. Even in 1942, 'A "Pakistan" that might mean the division of the Punjab and Bengal remained a distant thunder.' Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 144–5.
31. There was a move, supported by Gandhi and Jinnah, to create a united and independent Bengal. As late as 28 May 1947 Mountbatten recorded two alternative statements: Broadcast 'A' to be used if Bengal was to be partitioned; Broadcast 'B' if Bengal to remain unified (Ibid, p. 151). The scheme was vetoed by the Congress leadership.
32. Rochana Bajpai, 'Constituent Assembly Debates and Minority Rights', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, Nos. 33–34 (2000), pp. 2210–2.
33. Bose and Jalal (note 29), chapter 18.
34. Ibid., p. 177.
35. Gandhi had taken a back seat in the negotiations over a constitutional settlement. As early as 10 June 1928, he proclaimed: 'I am concentrating my attention upon the means of attainment of swaraj [self rule]. Neither the Statutory Commission nor constitution-making appeals to me as part of the means.' Judith Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928–34* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 27.
36. Varshney (note 24), p. 39.
37. Apurbu Kundu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus* (New York: St Martin's, 1998), pp. 76–7.
38. Manor (note 13), p. 33.
39. In Hyderabad, the Muslim ruler of a largely Hindu population was reluctant to accede to Congress domination; in Jammu and Kashmir, the Hindu ruler of a predominantly Muslim territory sought independence, until he was forced to ask for support from India after incursions from Pakistan.
40. See for more analyses of this factor: Renske Doorenspleet and Cas Mudde, 'Upping the Odds; Deviant Democracies vs. Theories of Democratization', *Democratization*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2008).
41. Lijphart (note 4).
42. Ibid., p. 260.
43. Ibid., pp. 262–3.
44. Steven Ian Wilkinson, 'India, Consociational Theory, and Ethnic Violence', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (2000), pp. 767–91.
45. Ibid., pp. 777–8; Katharine Adeney, 'Constitutional Centring: Nation Formation and Consociational Federalism in India and Pakistan', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2002), p. 25.
46. Ian Lustick, 'Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control', *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1979), pp. 325–44.
47. Wilkinson (note 43), p. 770.
48. Adeney (note 44), p. 25.
49. Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), chapter 6.
50. Atul Kohli, 'Interpreting India's Democracy: A State-Society Framework', in Atul Kohli (ed.), *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 3.
51. Manor (note 14), pp. 30–1.
52. Katherine Adeney and Andrew Wyatt, 'Democracy in South Asia: Getting beyond the Structure-Agency Dichotomy', *Political Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2004), p. 9.
53. Stuart Corbridge and John Harris, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 55.
54. Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

55. Ibid., p. 287.
56. James Manor, '"Ethnicity" and Politics in India', *International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (1996), p. 463.
57. Ibid., p. 473.
58. Oliver Heath, 'Anatomy of BJP's Rise to Power: Social, Regional and Political Expansion in 1990s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, Nos. 34–35 (1999), pp. 2511–7.
59. Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, and Yogendra Yadav, '"Nation State" or "State Nation": India in Comparative Perspective', in K. Shankar Bajpai (ed.), *Democracy and Diversity: India and the American Experience* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 50–106.
60. M. V. Rajeev Gowda and E Sridharan, 'Parties and the Party System, 1947–2006', in Sumit Ganguly, Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner (eds), *The State of India's Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 3–25.
61. Mitra (note 21), pp. 420–1.

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