

# HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE DOES POLITICS MAKE? REGIME DIFFERENCES ACROSS INDIAN STATES AND RURAL POVERTY REDUCTION

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The objective of this paper is to attempt to define regime differences across Indian states and to explore the relationships of these both with (i) factors that are instrumental in reducing (rural) poverty and (ii) the adoption and resourcing of pro-poor policies. This is an interesting problem, in the context of an overall concern with the factors in political systems which influence the development of pro-poor policies and their implementation, because - as Atul Kohli argued (1987: 3-4) - India seems to offer something of a laboratory for investigating the effects of types of political regime on the alleviation of rural poverty from above, given that there is some political diversity between different states, within the framework of Indian federalism. Kohli himself, in a comparative study of three states, concluded that politics does make a significant difference to the adoption of pro-poor policies in the Indian context. Others disagree. V S Vyas and P Bhargava, for example, summing up the findings of comparative studies of public intervention and rural poverty alleviation in nine states<sup>1</sup>, say emphatically that “success in poverty alleviation efforts was not significantly affected ... [at least] by the professed political ideology of the ruling parties in the different states [recognising that political ideology is not synonymous with ‘regime type’:JH]” (1995: 2572). This paper will consider evidence and argument on both sides of this debate, which is more significant than it once was because of the increased salience of state-level politics in the context of India’s economic reforms. The greater financial autonomy of the states which these entail “is likely to combine with increased regulatory autonomy ... making the state level a more important political arena, and therefore, more in need of study” (Jenkins 1996: 198).

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<sup>1</sup> This was a programme of work undertaken by a group of distinguished Indian scholars between 1989 and 1993, in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Kerala. The results were published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 October 1995.

Kohli's study of *The State and Poverty in India* (1987), aimed in the end to show that there is 'room for manoeuvre' even in the context of a democratic capitalist polity with a regime, at the centre, which is "incapable of imposing authority (and) typically provides economic incentives to propertied groups to buttress its own political support and at the same time to stimulate productive activities" (1987: 8). His strong conclusion, from comparison of the performances of state regimes in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, in carrying out land reforms, supporting small farmers, and supporting the wages and employment of the landless, was that "a tightly organised ideological party can penetrate the rural society without being coopted by the propertied groups" whereas, conversely "multi-class regimes with loose organisation and diffuse ideology are not successful at reformist intervention". This last statement referred particularly to the Janata government of Uttar Pradesh. In Karnataka "Coherent leadership and populist ideology [in the time of Devaraj Urs' chief ministership in the 1970s] facilitated a modicum of reform. The organisational base, however, was weak and the propertied classes penetrated the ruling groups ...". In other words it is most likely that pro-poor redistribution will be accomplished by well-organised left-of-centre regimes, exactly like the one which has held power in West Bengal now since 1977, and which has the following critical characteristics (according to Kohli): (a) coherent leadership; (b) ideological and organisational commitment to exclude propertied interests from direct participation in the process of governance; (c) a pragmatic attitude toward facilitating a non-threatening as well as a predictable political atmosphere for the propertied entrepreneurial classes; and (d) an organisational arrangement that is simultaneously centralised and decentralised, so that the regime is both 'in touch' with local society whilst not being subjected to local power holders. These regime attributes, Kohli argues, "make the institutional penetration of society possible, while facilitating a degree of regime autonomy from the propertied classes" (1987: 11)<sup>2</sup>. By contrast there is, he says, "little evidence in India's experience - including that of Punjab - to suggest that, over time, growth 'trickles-down'" (1987: 225).

## **An Outline of the Paper**

The paper starts with a review of some recent research on trends in rural poverty reduction in the major states of India. It is pointed out that the results of two studies which are widely regarded as authoritative - one by Minhas, Jain and Tendulkar, and the other by Datt and Ravallion - are (unsurprisingly) somewhat different as regards the ranking of the performance of different states. There is however some consistency in evaluating the performance of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, and generally of Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Haryana (though maybe not Punjab) as being better than those of Maharashtra, the North Indian states, and Karnataka. There is a particular discrepancy over the evaluation of the poverty reduction performance of Gujarat.

In the second part of the paper I briefly review some fairly well known evidence which shows that the economic dynamics of different states are historically deeply rooted; and that there are

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<sup>2</sup> This conclusion anticipates the 'embedded autonomy' thesis developed more recently by Peter Evans (1996) and, after him, by Michael Woolcock (1998), as I explained in an earlier note (1999).

connections between the levels of income in different states and their rates of growth, and levels of public developmental expenditure, which is recognised as playing a significant role particularly in agricultural growth, and this, in turn, as influencing the incidence of poverty. Interventions by the central government, through the Planning Commission and the Finance Commissions have not been very successful in reducing inter-state disparities in income levels or the distribution of public investment. The question is, then: how far have regime differences between states influenced the apparently quite strong conditions of path dependence affecting poverty?

The third section of the paper then turns to the identification of regime differences between Indian states. For reasons which are explained a central concern is with identifying the balance of class power in different regimes. It is argued that in the Indian case it is necessary to approach this question in terms of caste/class distinctions, building on an earlier effort at distinguishing between state regimes made by Church (1984), which is also conceptually consistent with the comparative studies of state regimes undertaken by a team of authors who worked with Frankel and Rao in the 1980s. Account is also taken of important general features of Indian politics, all of which can be seen as being related to the 'accommodationism' which has been such a strong feature of the Indian political system, and which has, arguably, both positive and negative features.

There follows, in section 4, an attempt to establish a typology of Indian state regimes, drawing on the earlier work. Essentially I distinguish between (i) states in which the traditional dominance of upper castes has not been seriously challenged, and there is a stable pattern of two-party competition; (ii) those in which upper caste dominance has been challenged and in which there is endemic political instability (which goes beyond factional in-fighting); (iii) states in which 'middle' castes/classes are dominant and political accommodation is more or less effective, and where the Congress party has remained a significant player; and (iv) three states in which I believe that it can be claimed that 'lower' castes/classes are more strongly represented in politics, though in different ways in each case. In all three the Congress Party lost its authority at an early stage and to a distinctly different political formation [The paper at present deals quite inadequately with these states - Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. I treated them as a point of reference in the research that I did for this paper, and realised too late that - extensively studied though all three have been by comparison with most if not all other states of the Indian Union - there may still be much to learn from the differences between them]. There is a good deal of detail on the politics of certain of the individual states in this section which may be skipped, if readers find the overall schema sensible.

In section 5 I report upon efforts, as yet incomplete, to explore differences between a group of eight states - Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal - which were selected partly to represent the different categories of regime types, and also in some cases because of their apparent distinctiveness in relation to the underlying dynamics of economic development, identified in section 2. Why should it be that Andhra Pradesh has done so much better, apparently, at poverty reduction than Karnataka when they seem in other significant respects to be quite comparable with each other? Why should Maharashtra, a rich state with high levels of public developmental expenditure have done so relatively poorly in poverty reduction? Why should Gujarat, another rich state (which was not part of my original 'sample' and which I have as yet only studied from some of the secondary literature) have done better - on some

estimations - at poverty reduction than Maharashtra? Why should Orissa, according to some estimations at least, have done significantly better than Madhya Pradesh? Questions of this kind may have political answers. I report on an initial attempt to compare patterns of public expenditure between these states, and their implementation of some parts of the central government directed and (largely) funded 'poverty alleviation programme'. I suggest that their widely differing use of the Public Distribution System may be particularly informative.

The findings of the paper, which need to be considered further, are that the regime differences which I have distinguished do seem to make sense of some of the variations in the adoption, resourcing and implementation of what can be described as 'pro-poor policies'. The structure and functioning of local agrarian power, and the relations of local with state-level power-holders, do vary significantly between states and exercise influence both on political patterns and on some policy outcomes.

## **1. Variations in Performance Across States in Regard to Poverty Reduction**

There are of course many different studies of poverty across the states and much variation in the results according to the methodologies employed, the data sources used, the cut-off points chosen, etc. Two authoritative studies are those by Minhas, Jain and Tendulkar (1991), and the more recent work of Datt and Ravallion (1998). The former examined trends in poverty alleviation performance in two periods, 1970-71 to 1983; and 1983 to 1987-88. They finally ranked the major states, in terms of both changes in the headcount ratio, and in absolute numbers of poor rural people, across both periods, as follows:

**1. Andhra Pradesh, 2. Kerala, 3. West Bengal, 4. Tamil Nadu, 5. Madhya Pradesh, 6. Uttar Pradesh, 7. Haryana, 8. Rajasthan, 9. Bihar, 10. Orissa, 11. Maharashtra, 12. Karnataka, 13. Himachal Pradesh, 14. Assam, 15. Punjab, 16. Gujarat, 17. Jammu & Kashmir.**

Only in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala were there reductions in both headcount ratio and absolute numbers in poverty, in both periods. The headcount ratio declined more in the first period than in the second in both Andhra and Kerala, and in Haryana and Rajasthan. It declined by more in the second period than in the first in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It declined in the first period but actually increased in the second in Orissa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Himachal, Assam, Punjab and Gujarat; increased in the first and declined (fractionally) in the second in Bihar; and it increased in both periods in Jammu and Kashmir. The significance of these variations is not at all clear, though it is to be noted that by the second period what may be described as India's 'poverty alleviation programme', involving targeted interventions designed to put productive assets into the hands of the poor (the Integrated Rural Development Programme), to provide employment (the National Rural Employment Programme), and to supply essential items at low prices to poor people (through the Public Distribution System), was fully in place, whereas it was not in the earlier part of the first period studied by Minhas and his co-authors. Vyas and Bhargava have later reported (1995) that according to their investigations the poverty ratio declined by only 3 per cent in the 'Pre-Poverty Alleviation Programme Period' (1970-71 to 1977-78) whereas it declined by more than 9 per cent in the 'Poverty Alleviation Programme Period' (1977-78 to 1987-88). If these estimates are reliable then it might be that the poor performance of those states in which

the incidence of poverty increased in period II (in the 1980s) reflects poor resourcing and/or implementation of the poverty alleviation programme.

Datt and Ravallion have analysed a comprehensive data set for the period 1960 to 1990, examining both rates of progress in reducing poverty and growth in average consumption (and the relationship between these two trends). They find that “By and large, the same variables determining rates of progress in reducing poverty mattered to the growth of average consumption (so that) There is no sign here of trade-offs between growth and pro-poor distributional outcomes” (1998: 34). They also find - *contra* Kohli - that the growth process in Punjab-Haryana [they treat the two states together because their earlier data refers to the undivided Punjab] “was unusually pro-poor” (p23). The analysis shows that in terms both of increases in average household consumption and of reductions in rural poverty Kerala has been the best performer amongst the states. It is followed by Andhra Pradesh and then by Punjab-Haryana, Gujarat, Orissa and Tamil Nadu, coming well ahead of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh (which are close together) and with Karnataka (which, according to Kohli’s analysis might have been expected to have done quite well) trailing far behind with one of the worst performances of all both in relation to poverty reduction and to consumption growth. In terms of rates of poverty reduction alone “the second, third and fourth states were Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, and Gujarat; the ranking is invariant to the choice of poverty measure although differences in their rates of poverty reduction are not large. The worst performer was Assam by all measures. The other poor performers were Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan; the exact ranking varies by the measure used” (1998: 23). Their ranking of states in terms of reduction in the incidence of poverty from around 1960 to around 1990, by the headcount index (probably the best comparator with the findings by Minhas et al), is as follows:

**1. Kerala, 2. Andhra Pradesh, 3. Punjab-Haryana, 4. Gujarat, 5. Orissa, 6. West Bengal, 7. Tamil Nadu, 8. Maharashtra, 9. Uttar Pradesh, 10. Rajasthan, 11. Karnataka, 12. Jammu & Kashmir, 13. Madhya Pradesh, 14. Bihar, 15. Assam**

Thus on all measures of states’ records in reducing rural poverty, and according to both teams of authors, both Kerala and Andhra Pradesh appear to have been high-performing states, and Karnataka, as well as J&K and Assam, clearly amongst the low-performing states. Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Orissa are states which have done fairly well, and consistently (according to different measures and different authors) better than Maharashtra; and the first two of these three states consistently better than what are commonly considered to be the ‘poverty heartland’ states of Bihar, UP, MP and Rajasthan. Findings are perhaps most ambiguous amongst the other major states with regard to Gujarat. As against Kohli’s suggestions, it is certainly interesting that there are states which have *not* had a regime in place like that of the Left Front in West Bengal, and which seem to have done as well or even better in terms of rural poverty reduction. There is a particular interest, too, in the evidence of variations in the performance of the three southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, and of Maharashtra, in view of Kohli’s general propositions, because in all of them there were Non-Brahman Movements in the colonial period which challenged upper caste/class authority in a way which did not occur in the same way or to the same extent elsewhere in India.

The Datt-Ravallion results on the variations in the performance of different states in reducing rural

poverty are explained, the authors argue, especially by variations in the trend rates of growth of average farm yields, and by differing initial conditions (they refer especially to irrigation infrastructure, levels of literacy and lower infant mortality rates). Variations in levels of state development spending were not found to be significant, but this, the authors argue “does not necessarily mean that such spending is irrelevant to progress in reducing rural poverty, since other (significant) variables in the model may themselves be affected strongly by development spending. The impact of initial conditions presumably reflects in part past spending on physical and human infrastructure [e.g investment by the colonial state in irrigation in Punjab; investments in education in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin: JH]. It can also be argued that agricultural and non-agricultural output are determined in part by public spending on (for example) physical infrastructure and public services” (1998: 31). Abhijit Sen, indeed, in commenting upon an earlier publication by Datt-Ravallion, which he says shows that “state development expenditure is the most significant variable ... decreasing poverty both by increasing average income and improving income distribution”, and in reporting the results of his own, comparable, exercise, argues that “the importance of state expenditure and of the relative food price appears to be fairly robust as factors explaining poverty both across time and space” (1996: 2473). It seems reasonable, then, if we follow these authors, to argue that state development expenditure does matter and, therefore, that it might be expected that variations in political regimes across states have exercised a definite influence on outcomes.

Other authorities explicitly disagree. Vyas and Bhargava, as was mentioned above, argue that the findings of their comparative studies show that variations of political ideology between states seem to make little or no difference to poverty reduction, though they do not present any systematic evidence to substantiate this conclusion. Variations in performance between states are explained by Vyas-Bhargava in terms of differences in initial and contextual conditions, by the pace and composition of economic growth (here, what is generally significant is whether or not growth is agriculture-based, and latterly how far it has involved growth in rural non-farm employment) - compare Datt-Ravallion on these points - and by competence in the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. The more successful states have, they say, invested in poverty alleviation programmes and “even with a poor record in programme implementation, generally the states which have invested heavily in such programmes as IRDP and JRY<sup>3</sup> ... have distinctly better records” (1995: 2572). It seems, then, that regime differences might well have significant effects on key factors influencing poverty outcomes, even if their direct effects are not clear-cut.

It is worthwhile, therefore, to address the question: ‘how far have regime differences between Indian states influenced positive movements away from the trends determined by the underlying dynamics of agricultural infrastructure and the ‘path dependence’ imparted - at least to some degree - by past public spending priorities?’. And, for example, if we take actual performance in reducing poverty as one indicator of a ‘pro-poor’ policy stance then it does not appear that the left-of-centre regime in West Bengal celebrated by Kohli has necessarily been outstanding, and that regimes in Andhra

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<sup>3</sup> JRY: Jawahar Rozgar Yohana - the rural employment programme created by the Government of India in 1989, by combining the National Rural Employment Programme and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme.

Pradesh and in Tamil Nadu, which have been described by commentators as ‘populist’ (that of N T Rama Rao’s Telugu Desam in Andhra, and those of the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu), may have done even better, even if Karnataka has done less well. There is something to be explained here.

## **2. Initial Conditions and Historical ‘Path Dependence’ in Inter-State Variations in Growth and Poverty**

Datt-Ravallion find that differences in the performances of the major Indian states in reducing rural poverty can be explained mainly in terms of the trend rates of growth of average farm yields combined with differing initial conditions - especially irrigation infrastructure and levels of literacy and health. They suggest that the latter probably reflect past public spending priorities. Of this there can be little doubt. Given the chronological proximity of their ‘initial conditions’ (around 1960) with the end of the colonial period (1947) the public spending of the colonial government must have been extremely important. It is surely significant that one-third of the gross public investment in irrigation between 1860 and 1947 was allocated to Punjab (some of it, admittedly, in what is now Pakistan Punjab), 21 per cent in the province of Bombay and Sind (but most of it in what became part of Pakistan - the irrigation potential of both Gujarat and especially of Maharashtra is rather low), 17 per cent in the United Provinces (corresponding closely with post-independence Uttar Pradesh) and 16 per cent in the old Madras Presidency (present-day Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and parts of Orissa) (Thavaraj, cited by Srivastava 1993: 193). Public investment does not account for all irrigation, of course, but research has demonstrated the complementarity between public and private investments in agricultural infrastructure in India (e.g Mohan Rao 1993)); and there is a clear correspondence between the parts of the country in which the colonial state made its irrigation investments and those states in which relatively high proportions of the operated area were irrigated around 1960<sup>4</sup>. Regional differentiation in colonial India resulted from the mutually reinforcing effects of the different ways in which land revenue was raised, which influenced modes of surplus appropriation in agriculture, and public investment: “investment in irrigation was concentrated chiefly in areas where gains in productivity could be skimmed off in additional revenue ...(and) .... the mutually reinforcing elements resulted in widely differing growth dynamics in the different regions” (Srivastava 1993: 149). The result was that, at independence, the states of the north-west and “the southern region around Madras and Bombay, and especially what later became the state of Gujarat, was better placed and had a better start in terms of both agriculture and industry” (p 150). Bharadwaj, too, in her analysis of regional differentiation, remarked upon the kind of virtuous spiral which was established in these regions of the country, connecting public investment, agricultural

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<sup>4</sup> Compare with Datt-Ravallion figures for states in their Table 2: Punjab-Haryana 41.02 per cent; Tamil Nadu 38.35; UP 34.76; AP 23.79. The same ranking appears in the data for 1970-71 given in the reports of the National Commission on Agriculture of 1976. These states are followed, in rank order, by Bihar & Orissa, Kerala and West Bengal, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh: ICSSR 1979, Table 8

growth, industrial development and ‘the general level of well-being’ (1982). The ‘initial conditions’ which Datt-Ravallion emphasise, were to a large extent the outcome of interventions by the colonial state in India. What happened thereafter?

Srivastava, in concluding his review of “Planning and Regional Disparities in India” written ten years ago - at the end of the period studied by Datt-Ravallion - wrote: “It is amazing that forty years into planning, the pattern of growth [and of ‘the general level of well-being’, if we follow Bharadwaj] should still bear a substantial correspondence with the historical location of relatively more dynamic class formations”<sup>5</sup>(1993: 187). For all the “overwhelming economic power wielded by the Centre” (Chelliah 1998: 346) in India’s form of federalism, and the interventions both of the Planning Commission and of the quinquennially appointed Finance Commissions, which advise on the allocation of public sector resources between the central government and the states, it “appears evident that there are inherent political-economic constraints on the Centre’s ability to impart significant progressiveness to its investment or transfers to backward states” (Srivastava 1993: 185)<sup>6</sup>. The interdependence of levels of state domestic product, and their rates of growth, and levels and rates of growth of state developmental expenditure remains strong, notwithstanding the efforts of the central government to bring about greater inter-state equity alongside fiscal discipline (reflected, for example, in the much higher level of statutory transfers from the Centre in relation to SDP in the low income states [those of my category ‘A’]: see Table 14.6A in Chelliah 1998). The recent findings of Rao, Shand and Kalirajan are eloquent: “Contrary to the predictions of neoclassical growth theory ... (there are) ... widening interstate disparities (in levels of income) ... mainly caused by the allocation of private investments which, in turn, has been influenced by the inequitable spread of infrastructure. The inequitable nature of public expenditure spread across states is attributed to the inability of the intergovernmental transfer mechanism to adequately offset the fiscal disabilities of the poorer states as well as (the) regressive nature of the invisible interstate transfers” (1999: 769).

The following table shows developmental expenditure per capita, on the Revenue Account for four selected years, for eight major states. It bears out the findings of the general literature on inter-state disparities:

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<sup>5</sup> Note that, though I have not yet found systematic data on the extent of NGO organisation across states, it was certainly the conventional wisdom in the NGO sector in the early 1990s that there was much more NGO activity in the same parts of the country: Gujarat and Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra, rather than Bihar, UP and MP. It was for this reason that ActionAid India, in its strategic planning, decided to change the basic geography of its programme.

<sup>6</sup> This is also the conclusion of, for example, Chelliah’s recent review of Centre-state fiscal relations, in the *festschrift* for India’s reforming Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh: Chelliah 1998.

*Table 1: Developmental Expenditure per capita (Rs, current prices)*

	1980-81	1985-86	1990-91	1995-96
AP	159.01	355.05	589.11	969.12
K	161.85	344.39	596.69	1185.3
Ker	197.23	378.78	614.45	1103.93
MP	143.29	270.51	499.40	835.00
Mah	202.05	435.68	770.66	1342.21
O	151.11	249.53	467.78	899.32
TN	170.14	342.2	727.76	1250.59
WB	142.55	261.5	515.74	758.81

source: calculated from Reserve Bank of India Bulletin, various issues

Datt-Ravallion argue that in addition to the set of initial conditions, inter-state variations in performance in reducing rural poverty have been strongly influenced by the trend rate of growth of farm yields - a conclusion which is broadly supported by a lot of other research (e.g Vyas-Bhargava). The rate of growth of farm yields, according to the results of much research, are influenced in turn by levels of investment in agricultural infrastructure (e.g Mohan Rao 1993); and levels of investment, public and private - which often seem to complement each other - in agricultural infrastructure correspond rather closely with long-running historical differences in income levels and levels of developmental expenditure. One recent study constructs a statewise index of agricultural infrastructure, and finds the following ranking: Punjab, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Haryana (with scores between 85 and 65 on the index, and which stand apart from) Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh (scores between 57 and 53 on the index, and which in turn stand apart from) West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan (Bhatia 1999: A-47).

There is quite a close correspondence with rates of growth of farm yields, though of course it is not absolute. The following are results obtained in a recent study by Bhalla and Singh (1997). They show that in spite of what is reported to be a rather high level of agricultural infrastructure the rate of growth of yields in Kerala has been low; Maharashtra has performed rather less well than the comparably endowed AP, Karnataka and Gujarat (though its irrigation endowment is less good); Rajasthan and UP much better than Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar:

Table 2: Growth of Crop Yield (per cent annual compound growth rates)

	A	B	C	D
AP	0.89	3.70	3.41	2.83
Bihar	1.08	0.10	2.86	1.46
Gujarat	2.07	2.78	2.28	2.39
Haryana	3.30	2.04	4.13	3.21
Karnataka	3.63	1.58	2.82	2.62
Kerala	1.64	-0.49	1.99	1.06
MP	1.07	0.80	3.75	2.04
Maharashtra	-2.62	4.94	2.62	1.95
Orissa	-0.13	0.72	2.64	1.25
Punjab	4.16	2.65	2.85	3.13
Rajasthan	3.07	0.52	3.95	2.56
TN	2.10	1.03	4.03	2.51
UP	1.83	2.38	3.39	2.63
WB	1.27	0.57	4.39	2.27

A= 1970-73 over 1962-65; B=1980-83 over 1970-73; C=1992-95 over 1980-83;  
D=1992-95 over 1962-65

source: Bhalla & Singh 1997: A-4 (Table 3)

While there are strong indications of long-running historical path dependence in the connections of levels of income in the different states, levels of public expenditure on a per capita basis, levels of investment in agricultural infrastructure, rates of growth of farm yields and the progress of poverty reduction, there are also interesting divergences. *Andhra Pradesh* is a middle income state<sup>7</sup> with middling levels of developmental expenditure and middling agricultural infrastructure (though it had a relatively high level of irrigation amongst its initial conditions), but it has had a comparatively high rate of growth of farm yields and been successful in reducing poverty. *Karnataka* is also a middle income state, generally with slightly higher levels of developmental expenditure and middling agricultural infrastructure (though lower irrigated area than AP), and it too has had a comparatively

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<sup>7</sup> Categorisations of 'upper', 'middle' and 'lower income states' used here taken from Rao et al 1999

high rate of growth of farm yields. Yet by all accounts it appears to have been one of the states which has been least successful in reducing poverty. *Kerala*, another middle income state, with fairly good infrastructure and a higher level of developmental expenditure, has done very well in reducing poverty but in spite of a poor agricultural performance. *West Bengal*, also middle income, has relatively low levels of developmental expenditure, relatively poor agricultural infrastructure on Bhatia's index, but has done well in raising farm yields in the recent past, and has a relatively good record on poverty reduction (though better according to Minhas et al than on Datt-Ravallion's reckoning). *Maharashtra* is a high income state with high levels of developmental expenditure, but rather a poor performance both in increasing farm yields and in reducing poverty. *Orissa* is a poor state, and according to Bhalla and Singh has a poor record in increasing yields, yet according to Datt-Ravallion it has done rather well in reducing poverty. *Uttar Pradesh* is a poor state but it is well endowed in terms of irrigation and it has had one of the higher rates of growth of crop yields, yet its record in poverty reduction is only middling. Is it possible to explain apparent divergences of these kinds from the trends set by long-run dynamics of economic development, in terms of differences in political regimes?

### 3. Defining Regime Differences in India

The term 'regime' is used widely but loosely in political science. It is quite often applied to a particular government, as in 'the Telugu Desam regime in Andhra'; but as frequently it is applied to such broad distinctions as that between democratic and authoritarian forms of rule. Clearly, in a discussion of Indian states, operating within the framework of federal democracy laid down in the Constitution of India, the latter distinction does not apply. We may be concerned, however, with differences in the democratic functioning of different states, and describe these in terms of 'regime types'.

'Democracy' is taken to mean: 'government by the people; the form of government in which sovereign power resides in the people and is exercised either directly by them [participatory democracy] or by officers elected by them [representative democracy]'. Clearly, this is a statement of an ideal, for it evades the real problems of collective action, which arise from the fact that the goals held by individuals ('the people') rarely coincide absolutely. Approaching the *ideal* of democracy, therefore, depends upon the differentiation of the realm of politics from overall systems of inequality in a society - so that collective decisions are not made by particular individuals or groups of people because of the power derived from their economic or social status (Rueschmayer et al. 1992: 41ff). In practice democratic forms of government, involving the accountability of the executive to an assembly of representatives elected through free, open elections, in the context of freedom of expression and association, can never eliminate altogether the significance of differences of wealth, power and status in society. Thus it has been that marxists have generally rejected such representative democracy as a sham, concealing the exercise of power by the dominant class. The view which is expressed by Rueschmayer and his co-authors is that the ideal of democracy is approached more or less closely according to the balance of class power in a society, and the nature of the state system. The development of capitalism is, in some ways, actually conducive to the approaching of the democratic ideal because it weakens the power of landlords and strengthens

subordinate classes, shifting them from the relatively unfavourable environment of peasant agriculture in which, as Marx argued in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, they are 'like potatoes in a sack' - divided from each other, lacking a sense of a collective interest, and given their identity by the more self-conscious classes which make up the rest of society. The democratic ideal is approached more closely, too, if the state-system (the organization of the state) is relatively autonomous in relation to society. But there is narrow gap between the Scylla, of a state-system dominated by particular interests within society, such as those of landlords, or of industrial capital, or of finance capital, and the Charybdis, of a state-system which is absolutely autonomous and able to exercise dictatorship over society, over-riding the interests and aspirations of 'the people'. This is where 'civil society' enters the equation: the more developed is the sphere of private, voluntary association, of civil society, the wider is the gap between the Scylla and the Charybdis, and the greater the space for democracy, for it implies that different interests are organised within society, and able to hold the organisations in the state-system to account (derived from Rueschmayer et al 1992).

In the light of this discussion it would seem perfectly sensible to compare Indian states as democratic regimes. Although the majority of the labour force across the whole country remains agricultural, there are important regional differences and - perhaps less clearly so - differences between states in terms of the organisation of agriculture, the level of development of capitalism, and of agrarian class structures. There are differences between states in terms of the extent of industrial development, and hence in the development of both the industrial bourgeoisie and the working class. These differences may then be reflected, in turn, in variations in the nature and the extent of political mobilisation, and of organisation in civil society, both of which are likely to be very significantly influenced, in the Indian context, by caste and other ethnic identities. These political differences may exercise a significant influence on the functioning of the various (state-level) 'state systems'. This is one level of comparison, therefore, which we might describe as 'structural'. Another is that of 'regime' in the sense, rather, of 'government'. This is the sense employed by Atul Kohli when he writes:

Variations in regional distributive outcomes ... are a function of the regime controlling political power. Regime type, in turn - at least in the case of India - closely reflects the nature of the ruling political party. The ideology, organization and class alliances underlying a party-dominated regime are then of considerable consequence for the redistributive performance of that regime (1987: 10)

In his book, of course, he goes on to compare the performance of different party-dominated regimes in three Indian states (the Left Front government in West Bengal, that of the Congress under Devaraj Urs in Karnataka, and that of the Janata coalition in UP in the later 1970s).

For the purposes of this paper, we may seek to distinguish regime differences across states at both the structural level and that of 'party-dominated government', searching in the first place for evidence on the nature and extent of political mobilisation and of organisation in both civil and political society. Following the preceding short discussion of democratic political systems we expect there to be a greater likelihood that the needs and strategic interests of poor people will be met in circumstances in which they are more effectively organised. One critical question, then, is this: *are there appreciable differences between states in terms of the balance of class power, and the*

*extent of political participation of historically subordinated, lower classes?*<sup>8</sup> What is the nature of this 'participation', ideologically and organisationally, and what are the relationships of the lower classes with other classes? *Note that it has often been argued that Indian politics are characterised by 'political accommodationism', referring to way in which dominant elites build coalitions of political support amongst sections of dependent groups by means of a strategy of selective inclusion*<sup>9</sup>.

Tackling these questions in the Indian case requires study of evidence on class structures and their relationships with caste/ethnicity and historical structures of dominance (defined, following Frankel and Rao as: 'the exercise of authority in society by groups who achieved socio-economic superiority and claimed legitimacy for their commands in terms of superior ritual status'<sup>10</sup>). 'Class formation' is always and everywhere a problematic concept. The relationships between 'objective' differences between groups of people, in terms of their roles and relations within productive systems, and the subjective categories in terms of which people experience and understand these roles and relations - between 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself' - have always to be treated contextually and historically. In the Indian case this means studying the relationships between class and caste. We know that there is no neat mapping between 'class' and 'caste', but there are strong broad correspondences, for example between land ownership and caste position. We also know that in many instances class relationships are experienced as relations between castes (see Harriss 1994). Sometimes potential or actual class political mobilisation is cross-cut by caste relations, and vice-versa - and sometimes not. In practice we have to study the class/caste bases of different regimes in order to address the critical question of 'the balance of class power'.

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<sup>8</sup> See points (b) - (d) in Kohli's list of defining regime characteristics (reproduced on page 1, above)

<sup>9</sup> Frankel's masterly analysis of India's political economy 1947-1977 shows how accommodation worked and what its effects were (Frankel 1978).

<sup>10</sup> In the two-volume work *Dominance and State Power in Modern India* (1989, 1990) edited by Frankel and Rao various authors analyse the relations of dominance, in this sense, and 'state power' ('the exertion of secular authority by individuals appointed or elected to offices of the state, who claim legitimacy under the law'). A central theme of the work as a whole concerns the decline of 'dominance', associated with Brahmanism.

The further steps in the analysis mean examining political organisation, including the formation of different types of association and the ideology, organisation and class alliances underlying different party-dominated regimes/governments. What are the stated objectives of different regimes? How do they seek to win support, ideologically and organisationally? What are the alliances on which they depend? What are the relationships between 'local power' and state-level politics? Questions concerning leadership and organisational and ideological coherence - which Kohli also highlighted - enter in here.

'Measuring' regime differences is obviously difficult, both conceptually and practically (given what is in some instances, in regard to India, the paucity of data, and in others data inconsistencies). We can obtain some qualitative information on the characteristics of different state regimes from the political science literature and from political commentaries (for example, Manor's commentary on the new support base built by Devaraj Urs between 1972 and 1980 in Karnataka)<sup>11</sup>. It is also of value to trace changes in the composition of state legislatures and of state governments (and the backgrounds of chief ministers, too) in terms of caste and occupation<sup>12</sup> (not of course that these translate at all directly into policy and policy practice, but still, shifts like that which took place in the 1970s when agriculturalists started to be represented much more strongly, are significant). It is possible to take quite systematic account of the frequency of changes of government and to derive from this indicators of regime stability, which can be supplemented from the descriptive literature. Generally my approach has been to try to develop a framework worked out by Roderick Church in a comparative discussion of state politics (in UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat) written in 1984.

At this time, Church argued, there was a 'crisis of participation' amongst lower castes/classes. This was in the context of a four-fold distinction between caste categories:

"The 'upper' castes, the 'high castes' or the 'twice-born' are the Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Banias. They have long dominated society and politics as landlords in the countryside and as businessmen and professionals in the city. [Note the connection that is made throughout the discussion between caste status and class positions]

The 'middle' castes are the principal farming castes (Jats, Yadhavs and Kurmis in the north, for example; Marathas in Maharashtra, and so on). According to caste tradition they are Sudras, the term for all those below the twice-born and above the untouchables, but they

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<sup>11</sup> There is a lot of variation in terms of the quantity, content and quality of the literature relating to different states, which presents a serious problem for exercises such as the present one. Very little is available on the politics of Madhya Pradesh, in particular (no articles in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, for example, between commentaries on the 1967 General Election and some on the Vidhan Sabha elections of 1993), and not much more on Orissa.

<sup>12</sup> Data (as from state *Who's Who* publications) are not readily available on these topics in the United Kingdom, however, and I have had to rely on secondary sources.

have a special status and importance because of their numbers and land. Typically they are kisans (farmers or [rich]/middle peasants. [It is usually the case that the locally 'dominant castes' - dominant by virtue of their control over land and labour, which are still commonly the basis of local political power - are from these 'middle' castes].

At the bottom of the traditional status hierarchy are the '*scheduled*' castes, the ex-untouchables, who now have special constitutional protection and privileges. They are primarily agricultural labourers.

The *lower*' castes form an economic and social stratum which is sandwiched between the middle castes above them and the Scheduled Castes below. It is composed of marginal farmers, share-croppers and landless labourers from low status agricultural castes together with traditional service and artisan castes - barbers, boatmen, blacksmiths, carpenters, grain-parchers, oil-pressers, and so on. The proportion of people in this stratum varies from region to region, but it is usually about a third of the population<sup>13</sup>. Because individual castes are usually small and widely dispersed, as well as poor, the lower castes find it difficult to develop a common sense of identity or to assert much political power on their own. (*These lower castes are the last stratum to be brought into politics ...*" (Church 1984: 230-31;emphasis mine)

Church went on to argue that by the 1960s "the only people systematically excluded from a share of political representation and policy benefits were the castes below the middle castes and above the Scheduled Castes" and that as people from these groups sought a larger share in state power, they encountered resistance or attempts at co-optation on the part of dominant groups (from the upper and middle castes): "This is evident in new levels of violence and corruption, in populist appeals to the 'poor', in calls for law and order, in the emergence of regionalism, in struggles over reservations for the 'backward classes', and in the efforts of political parties to recruit representatives from lower castes" (this and the previous quotation, Church 1984: 231). This powerful statement has proven remarkably accurate, and it applies to Indian politics in the 1990s, as well as to the 1980s (see Corbridge and Harriss 1999, chapter 6).

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<sup>13</sup> Church and others refer to the last censuses which attempted to record population numbers by caste categories, those for 1921 and 1931, in working out caste distributions in different parts of India.

The lower castes have mobilised, or have been mobilised politically in several different ways: (i) as 'poor people', held to have interests in common with Scheduled Castes and Tribes; (ii) through status appeals, when a hard-pressed upper caste group seeks to recruit their support (as happened in the Kshatriya movement in Gujarat, when Rajput Kshatriya were prepared to concede 'Kshatriya' status to hitherto low-ranking Kolis in order to increase their political clout), or when it is sought to establish links between middle and lower castes as fellow members of the 'Backward Classes'<sup>14</sup>; (iii) by emphasising the regional community (through appeals, for example, to 'We Telugus' or 'We Bengalis'). Such attempts, however, to unite the lower castes with those above them are inherently problematical because of real differences in economic interests. The lower castes may be won by populist appeals (as Indira Gandhi sought to) "but they can also be drawn to more radical alternatives, as well as to the regional parties. The net effect is to make political coalitions more fluid and to add a new element of uncertainty to party politics" (Church 1984: 233).

Around the early-middle 1980s, Church argued, the patterns of politics in different states could be understood in terms the extent and mode of political participation of the lower castes: "First, there are those states in which lower castes have achieved positions of power in the legislature and government and *where government policy to some extent addresses the concerns of the poor* (my emphasis; JH). These include West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala and (perhaps to a lesser extent) Maharashtra. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar remain states where the lower castes have made little progress. Second, among states in which the lower castes have made the most progress, there are those in which the Congress [the party which came into being in the course of the Freedom Struggle, and which ruled India without break from independence in 1947 up until 1977, and again after 1980] has taken the initiative in recruiting the lower castes and bringing change" (1984: 236-7). Thus Church proposed *a typology of political regimes in different states, in the early 1980s*, as follows:

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of 'Backward Classes' is an important one, which is politically alive in India. There is a long history of official debate over whether or not members of certain other caste groups should be the subjects of positive discrimination - as are the Schedule Castes - on account of their 'social' backwardness. Article 340 of the Indian Constitution refers to 'other backward classes' who may be eligible for preferential treatment in access to public sector employment or to educational institutions, and requires that they should be identified by a commission appointed by the President. When the V P Singh government decided, in 1990, to adopt the recommendations of the second such Backward Classes Commission there was violent protest from members of upper castes especially across northern India. The extraordinary sensitivity surrounding 'Mandal' (the name of the chairman of the second commission, which came to be applied generally to the recommendations of the report) is in part a reflection of the increasing political strength of some of the 'OBCs' ('other backward classes'), and may also have contributed to its development. One reason for favouring the use of Church's distinction between 'middle' and 'lower' castes, rather than - as is often the case in political commentary in and on India - using only the category of 'OBCs', is precisely that the latter are quite clearly differentiated in the way that Church suggests.

A: Upper-caste/class dominated Congress regimes

Bihar  
Uttar Pradesh  
+ [Madhya Pradesh  
Orissa  
Rajasthan]

B: Lower castes/classes recruited into Congress regimes

Gujarat  
Karnataka  
Maharashtra [?:JH]  
+ [Andhra Pradesh?]

C: Lower castes/classes strongly represented in non-Congress regimes

Kerala  
West Bengal  
+ [Tamil Nadu]

[D: Competition between Congress and a 'middle' caste regional party  
(excluding lower castes/classes?)

Punjab]

notes:

1. The evidence supporting Church's classification is found in the papers in Wood, ed (1984)
2. I have added other states (+ [...]), which Church did not consider, in the light mainly of evidence found in the relevant chapters in Frankel and Rao's two-volume work on state politics:

*Orissa*, described in detail by Mohanty (1990) as still dominated by Brahmans and Karans [scribes, comparable with Kayasths in northern India].

*Rajasthan*, dominated by Rajputs, as indeed it remains to the present (see the article by Jenkins 1998; which shows how even the Jats in the state, an important 'middle' caste, in Church's terms, have been kept out of power).

*Madhya Pradesh* is not included in Frankel and Rao's volumes, perhaps because, as Christophe Jaffrelot has noted recently, traditional dominance by princes and upper castes was still not in decline in that state at the time at which Frankel-Rao and their co-authors were writing, in the mid-80s - indeed it hardly is today (Jaffrelot 1998: 40).

*Andhra Pradesh*, is perhaps more clearly placed in category B than Maharashtra. Andhra politics were still dominated mainly by Reddys, and in some of the coastal districts by Kammas, in a way which was

comparable with Maratha dominance in Maharashtra. But, Ram Reddy notes “The Congress Party [in Andhra] under the direction of Mrs Gandhi [and her satrap, P V Narasimha Rao, as chief minister] succeeded to a substantial extent in weakening the hold of the rich peasantry over the ‘vote banks’ provided by the poor peasants and landless [this is analysed in detail in the ethnographic account of Marguerite Robinson (1988)]”, so that when Mrs Gandhi was defeated nationwide in 1977 after the period of Emergency rule “in Andhra Pradesh the Janata Party could not make a dent in her hold over the poorer sections. The Backward castes and the Harijans continued to identify Mrs Gandhi with the poor, while the dominant agricultural castes aligned themselves with the Janata. The Congress victory, with the support of the weaker sections, indicated an increasing social polarization both along caste and class lines” (1989: 284).

*Tamil Nadu.*: Here the Congress lost control in 1967, ceding power to the Dravida Munnetra Karagham, a regional party which propagated Tamil cultural nationalism, and which was successful in mobilising lower castes against Tamil Nadu’s relatively fragmented dominant castes.

*Punjab.* While each of these major states presents a distinctive political history, Punjab arguably constitutes a case apart which cannot be incorporated into the three main categories which have been distinguished. The structure of dominance around Brahmans/Kshatriyas which prevailed over most of India was not strongly developed here, because of the importance of Sikhism. Punjab was also strongly affected by social reform movements with anti-Brahmanical overtones, in the later 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. So it has not been a state with an ‘Upper caste/class dominated Congress regime’. Modern Punjab politics are fundamentally influenced by the relations of Sikhs, who are predominant in rural parts of the state, and Hindus who, although they only make up a little more than a third of the whole population, are numerically dominant in urban areas. Politics have been dominated since independence by competition between a strong Sikh-based regional party, the Akali Dal, and Congress, both of them subject to intense factionalism, with the communist parties and Hindu nationalist Jan Sangh/BJP also playing significant roles. It is said that “Elite (Sikh) Jat dominance under the hegemony of successful landowners is one important dimension of the Akali Dal” (Wallace 1990: 456). In terms of Church’s definitions it can be described as a ‘middle’ caste dominated party. Some poorer Sikhs, including Sikh Artisans, and certainly the Sikh Scheduled Castes (who make up close to 30 per cent of the population), have generally been inclined to support the Congress, which has also been supported by some of the town-based Hindus, others of whom have supported the Jan Sangh/BJP. The communist parties have won support from “marginal (Sikh) farmers rather than landless labourers” (Wallace 1990: 446). The Akali Dal has usually had to pursue a strategy of accommodation with Hindus in order to secure and hold office, and has commonly entered into alliance with the Jan Sangh/BJP (as indeed it has done at the national level within the loose coalition which kept the BJP in office in central government after the 1998 General Election). The effect has been to exclude those who would be referred to in terms of the schema proposed here as ‘lower castes/classes’ from significant political participation; and it is thought that the movement led by Bhindranwale, which brought civil war to the state in the 1980s, appealed to poor Sikhs as well as to educated unemployed youth.

3. Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Assam, amongst the major states, are not considered here.

Before proceeding to extend this framework to take account of political developments in the last fifteen years it is important to take account of other factors which make for differences between political regimes: ideology, leadership, organisation and stability (all aspects of the institutionalisation of politics). In the Indian case all of these are affected by certain general (national) tendencies of politics and governance. The first of these is that, although much policy analysis, not least in writing on poverty, seems to operate with the implicit assumptions that the Indian state(s) corresponds with

the model of rational-legal authority, and that it is engaged in rational problem-solving in the common interest, the reality is of course very different. It is a notorious fact that political life in India has become increasingly criminalised and is in thrall to those whom Chatterjee describes as “self-seeking and unprincipled political speculators”, for whom “politics is ... a business, like speculating in share markets ... a risky business where you can go bust all of a sudden, but where you can also make a fortune if things go all right” (1997[1991]: 213-14). Though the extent of outright criminality has steadily increased Indian politics has always had the characteristics of a ‘risky business’ with potentially very high returns. Though many of the early legislators were extraordinarily principled and personally austere, not all were, and the prospect that the Congress would form ministries in 1937, under the Government of India Act, had already brought in many new members, attracted by the possibilities of government patronage. The Congress party machine which exercised largely unchallenged authority, both at the centre and in the states, for the first 30 years of the history of independent India was always oiled by patronage - the exchange of offices, jobs and access to public resources for the mobilisation of electoral support, or ‘the loaves and the fishes of offices and jobs’, as Ashok Mehta memorably put it - rather than an organisation dependent upon active cadres. It is by these means that ‘political accommodationism’, referred to earlier - selective inclusion, designed to build coalitions of support - has been made to work. But increasingly, through the history of independent India, political office has been sought in order to derive rents in various forms.

Government, generally, is pervaded by these mechanisms. As Robert Wade explains in careful detail in a paper entitled ‘The Market For Public Office: Why the Indian State Is Not Better At Development’: “the bureaucracy acquires control of funds, partly from the clients and partly from the state treasury, channels these funds upwards to higher ranks and politicians, the latter in turn using the funds for distributing short-term inducements in exchange for electoral support” (1985: 484). Paul Brass adds to this picture: “at the local level, protection from police victimisation and the use of the police to harass one’s rivals have become critical elements in the powers of local politicians. Politicians in the districts of India who wish to build a stable political base for themselves, therefore, must not only be able to distribute money and patronage, but must also be able to control the police” (1990:56). So much for rational-legal authority.

One of the concomitants of these general features of the Indian political system is that there is competition for ‘the spoils of office’. Large majorities are often not a guarantee of a stable and secure government, because it is then more difficult for those in power to satisfy the aspirations of all their supporters. There is a built-in tendency towards factionalism - competition between groups led by particular individuals who are in pursuit of personal gain and personal differences, rather than being divided from each other ideologically. Ideology, indeed, counts for rather little in this political system. And there is no major state which has not experienced periods of instability as a result of factional in-fighting in ruling parties. Changes of government, in this context, most emphatically, often mean nothing more than a reshuffling of personnel, and have absolutely no ideological or policy implications.

Another aspect of the spoils system of politics is that political parties are but weakly institutionalised (they are not dependent upon active cadres but rather on the prospect or the actuality of the

distribution of spoils). This is a problem which has grown progressively worse, as many commentators have remarked, since Indira Gandhi, in pursuing her struggle for ascendancy over the old leadership of the Congress party in the late 1960s and 1970s, rather systematically broke up the old Congress machine. Atul Kohli, revisiting in the 1980s places in which the late Myron Weiner studied local Congress organisation in the 1960s, reported that he could find little active 'organisation' to speak of, at all (1990). The same is true of other political parties, as well (see, for example, Manor's comments on the Janata Dal in Karnataka: 1998). Interventions by central government in state-level politics, which have increased in frequency as part of these developments, have also contributed significantly to political instability.

The outstandingly successful political parties of the last quarter-century have been the CPI(M) in West Bengal and Kerala, the Jan Sangh/BJP in parts of North India, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, and the DMK/ADMK in Tamil Nadu. These parties, while they have certainly not always been above the games of patronage and corruption<sup>15</sup>, do have organisation and (less so, latterly, in the case of the DMK/ADMK) coherent ideology (crude though this may seem to outsiders to be, in the case of Shiv Sena especially). An important influence, therefore, upon regime differences at state level is the extent to which states have been governed by these parties. The DMK/ADMK in Tamil Nadu, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, and the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, are strong parties with frankly regional agendas and organisations. But in practice the CPI(M) in West Bengal and Kerala, and the BJP in the north Indian states in which it is most strong, where it has established distinctive regional versions of the overall ideology of *hindutva* (see Hansen on the BJP in Maharashtra 1996, 1998; and Jenkins on Rajasthan, 1998), function like regional parties, as has the Janata Dal in Karnataka and Orissa. It is significant - and refers back to the initial discussion above, distinguishing between regimes in terms of the extent and mode of participation by lower castes/classes - that as Partha Chatterjee has put it: "The more the processes of democracy have deepened in India, the more has its centre of gravity moved downwards ... (and that) ... Today, there are numerous groups that are able to make their demands heard in the democratic arena ...". But there are differences, still, in these respects, between states.

A few words more on idea of the 'accommodationism' of Indian politics (the following has been stimulated by Jenkins, 1996). This can be viewed either positively or negatively, or - perhaps more sensibly - as having positive as well as negative aspects. From a radical perspective 'accommodation' means at best fudge and tokenism, if not deliberate manipulation to head-off pressure for the thorough-going structural changes which are necessary for the empowerment of poor, exploited and oppressed people. But accommodation can also be considered positively, as part of a gradual process of change which may lead to greater equity and inhibit violence, in a context in which radical change is politically infeasible (this is more or less what the authors of *Redistribution With Growth* argued in the 1970s, of course). The standard works on the political economy of India, those of Pranab Bardhan (1984) and of Francine Frankel (1978), converge around the view that political accommodation has frustrated the projects both of rapid economic

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<sup>15</sup> *A fortiori* during the period in which Jayalalitha, leader of the ADMK, was chief minister of Tamil Nadu after 1991.

growth and of human development in India, and Paul Brass, in his survey of Indian politics, argues that “‘accommodative politics’ have failed and cannot succeed in the face of growing class antagonisms in the countryside and the increasing dominance of India’s ‘proprietary classes’” (1990: 246). This last assessment seems to have been falsified by events in the decade since it was written, but it will be argued here that there are significant differences between states in the extent to which accommodative politics still work, and in their modalities<sup>16</sup>.

We are now in a position to attempt to extend and develop the framework first worked out by Church.

#### **4. A Typology of Indian State Regimes**

*Ai: states in which upper caste/class dominance has persisted and Congress remained strong in the context of a stable two-party system [ ‘traditional dominance’ rather than politics of accommodation vis-a-vis lower classes]*

Madhya Pradesh

[?Orissa]

Rajasthan

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<sup>16</sup> Jenkins’ argument, developed in the context of a discussion about ‘the politics of protecting the poor’, in the process of economic reform in Maharashtra, is an interesting one. He suggests “that both the rich and politicians alike, though clearly diverting to themselves a good deal of the resources meant for the poor, have something to gain from preserving a system of social welfare which has allowed them to control the flow of resources and thereby to shore up their waning traditional authority ... there may be life left yet in the corpse of political accommodationism” (1996: 200). And no bad thing, either, for the poor of Maharashtra, he seems to suggest, for on this stands their best chance of gaining some protection from the effects of economic liberalisation. There are political pressures in India, in his view, which will tend to create the conditions for the type of coalition envisaged by Joan Nelson between ‘some among the poor’ and those in middling income deciles.

***Aii: states in which upper caste/class dominance has been effectively challenged by middle castes/classes, and Congress support has collapsed in the context of fractured and unstable party competition [both 'dominance' and the politics of accommodation have broken down]***

Bihar  
Uttar Pradesh

*Note that these five states are classified as 'low income states'*

***B: states with middle caste/class dominated regimes, where the Congress has been effectively challenged but has not collapsed [the politics of accommodation vis-a-vis lower class interests have continued to work effectively, most effectively in Maharashtra and Karnataka, least effectively in Gujarat]***

Andhra Pradesh  
Gujarat  
Karnataka  
Maharashtra  
[?Punjab]

*Note that AP and Karnataka are 'middle income states', and Punjab, Gujarat and Maharashtra are 'high income states'*

***C: states in which lower castes/classes are more strongly represented in political regimes***

Kerala  
Tamil Nadu  
West Bengal

*Note that these three states are 'middle income states'*

[D: Punjab?]

Ai: States where upper caste/class dominance has persisted

***MP and Rajasthan:***

These are both constituted largely by former princely states and in both some of the former rulers have remained politically powerful. They are states, too, in which right wing parties - Swatantra in the 1960s, and the Jan Sangh, later BJP - have historical strength. The Jan Sangh shared office in Madhya Pradesh, briefly, as early as 1967, establishing a pattern of two-party competition at an early stage; and the party led the Janata Government in Rajasthan after 1977. The BJP took office in both states in 1990, and retained it in 1993 (after a period of President's Rule, following the demolition of the Babri Masjid at

Ayodhya in 1992) in Rajasthan (until 1998, when the party lost) though not in Madhya Pradesh (where the party lost again to Congress in 1998). Neither state has offered much opportunity for left-wing political parties or their ideologies. While political leadership in Rajasthan was divided between Brahmans, Rajputs, and Jats, and the State Assemblies dominated by these three groups, and the Scheduled Castes, Jenkins has shown how the BJP has been a vehicle for extending Rajput dominance (1998). Narain and Mathur remarked that “The day when the placidity and civility of Rajasthan politics will be rocked by the ‘power-drive’ of the agricultural castes, while bound to arrive, is difficult to predict” (1990: 53). It has still not come. Jaffrelot’s work on politics in Madhya Pradesh (1998), similarly, shows the continuing pre-eminence of Brahmans, Rajputs and Baniyas in both the BJP and the Congress in that state, though it seems that part of the reason for the success of Congress in retaining office in the state, is that the party, under Digvijay Singh’s leadership, has been successful in incorporating some from the lower castes, and members of the Scheduled Tribes (who make up one-fifth of the state’s population). This is the context, too, of some apparently progressive measures in education and local self-government in the recent past. Previously the Congress in MP had a long history of factionalism, and the longest single period in office of any CM, before Digvijay Singh, was that of Arjun Singh (between 1980 and 1985). The most significant changes of party regime in these two states are those which have taken place in the 1990s.

### ***Orissa:***

Orissa has features in common with these two states. It too was partially constituted by former princely states, and like MP it has a high proportion of Scheduled Tribes within its population. The princes of Orissa seem to have been less successful in retaining political power, but the right wing parties, initially Swatantra - to which some of the princes gravitated and which took part in a coalition government after 1967 - and later the Jan Sangh/BJP, have long been influential. Mohanty argues that “a *brahman-karan* middle class dominates society and politics in contemporary Orissa” (1990: 321); and that “The failure of caste associations or opposition parties to pave the way for the autonomous politicisation of the lower castes ... facilitated the continuation of upper caste control over major political parties” (1990: ). The numerical strength of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the population of the state “could not be exploited by the left parties ... conservative elements could manage to receive their [the SCs’/STs’] political support ... (and) despite their visible presence in the state and the legislature they have not emerged as an independent political force” (Misra 1989: 254). Left-wing parties have never won much support outside small pockets. The most outstanding political leader from Orissa has been the late Biju Patnaik, who maintained a political following in opposition to Congress for over two decades, widening the social base of electoral politics and mobilising the rising ‘agrarian middle class’, as Mohanty describes it, including notably *khandayats*, numerically the largest single caste group, and who should probably be considered to be ‘middle’ caste (in terms of Church’s definitions; and see Mitra 1982). Biju Patnaik led the Janata Dal government of Orissa after 1990, before losing office again to Congress in 1995. The politics of Orissa have had an unusually strong personal element, and party contests have been governed by intra-elite competition. Latterly the Congress and Patnaik’s following (which has passed substantially to his son Navin, now leader of the Biju Janata Dal, which is in alliance with the BJP) have competed for power, operating from the same social base, and, “Monopolising the competitive arena they (have) pre-empted alternative popular forces from acquiring political significance” (Mohanty 1990:). It is unlikely, here, that changes of party-regime are of any great significance for policy or its implementation.

Aii: States where upper caste/class dominance has been effectively challenged

***Bihar*** and ***Uttar Pradesh***<sup>17</sup> are the core states of the ‘Hindi Heartland’, where the upper castes were

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<sup>17</sup> I do not deal with these states in much detail here since they do not feature prominently in my analysis

much more numerous. The Congress party in both states was dominated by members of these upper castes. Zoya Hasan writes of UP that “from the outset the ruling party restricted the access of lower castes to positions in government, and successive Congress regimes were dominated by upper castes-classes. Upper caste domination provided the framework of political bonding in a fragmented society” (1998: 19). But ‘middle’ caste, in our terms, ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBCs) have become politically powerful in both states; the Congress party has very substantially destroyed itself, after ruling each state for most of the time from independence up to 1989/1990, and no longer has much of an electoral base; and politics in each are fragmented, and bitterly contested between formations which derive from the Lok Dal, in which OBCs are strong, the BJP, to which the upper castes have gravitated but which seeks, as elsewhere, to win support from lower castes as well, and Dalit-based parties (notably the Bahujan Samaj party, one of whose leaders, Mayawati, became the first woman from a Scheduled Caste to hold the chief ministership of a major state, in a brief tenure in UP in 1995). The rule of law has broken down to a greater extent in Bihar than elsewhere in India, but the Home Minister of India went on record in the Lok Sabha in March 1997 to state that UP is moving towards ‘anarchy, chaos and destruction’.

#### B: States with ‘middle’ caste/class dominated regimes

There are of course many differences between these states. But they are alike in having powerful ‘middle’ castes/classes - numerically significant, locally dominant castes, but whose dominance extends over wide areas, and which have generally exercised pervasive political influence: the Reddys and Kammas of Andhra Pradesh (who make up, together, about 20 per cent of the population); the Patidars of Gujarat (about 12 per cent); the Lingayats and Vokkaligas of Karnataka (who together constitute 30 per cent or so of the population); and the Marathas in Maharashtra (30 per cent or so of the population of the state). The Jat Sikhs, similarly, constitute more than 20 per cent of the population of Punjab. Upper castes (Brahmans, Banias and Kshatriyas) have been significant in the politics of all four states, but more so in Gujarat, where Brahmans and Banias generally dominated the ruling Congress party up to and through the 1960s (Wood 1984). In all these states the dominant ‘middle’ castes (and the upper castes) have been challenged by lower castes, or they have accommodated lower caste aspirations, but the political grip of the ‘middle’ castes has remained strong. They are also states in which the BJP now has a significant presence, which is significant in relation to the concerns of this analysis especially because of the way in which the party has mobilised support which cross-cuts middle classes and some groups of poor people, though not in a way which promises to deliver very much to the latter. The strength of the BJP is evident in Gujarat, where it came to power in 1995 and has been in office, though not without internal convulsions, for much of the time since then, and in Maharashtra, where it has also held office, in alliance with Shiv Sena, since 1995. The BJP’s electoral strength in both Andhra Pradesh, where it won 18 per cent of the vote and 4/42 seats in the 1998 General Election, but has virtually no presence in the Vidhan Sabha (State Assembly), and in Karnataka, where it won 27 per cent of the vote in 1998 and became the second largest party in the Vidhan Sabha in 1994, albeit with a much smaller share of the vote than the Congress, is much less secure. Manor argues that the prospects of the BJP in Karnataka still depend rather on the self-destruction of the Congress and the Janata Dal than on its own efforts, and that the BJP’s organisation “has always been far less strong and extensive in Karnataka than its counterparts in northern and western India” (1998: 194). It is likely to remain a minor force, in his view, in Andhra Pradesh, though the showing of the party in the 1998 General Election showed that it has finally arrived in the state.

#### *Andhra Pradesh:*

The politics of this state have continued to be dominated by ‘Forward Caste’ Reddys and Kammas, major landholders and in the case of the Kammas especially, successful industrialists, who have pursued effective strategies of accommodation of the interests of the lower castes/classes, assisted in this by the

fact that though those described as 'backward castes' make up about 50 per cent of the population in the districts of Andhra Pradesh they are also unevenly distributed and divided into a large number of small groups. "In its actual functioning, the practice of political accommodation took on an ad hoc and expedient character in response to the various claims raised by competing social groups. Radical politics [in a state in which communists were initially powerful - it was thought likely that the CPI would form the first government of the state after its formation in 1956] were thereby avoided and ameliorative measures pursued" (this and the following quotations from Ram Reddy 1989: 265). The politics of patronage (in which "The underlying assumption was that every aspirant to power had his price ...", p 265) gave way, as a result of the policies adopted in the 1970s under the inspiration of Mrs Gandhi to a populist strategy, which continued to win her and her party support in the state even in the aftermath of the Emergency (as noted above). But by the end of the 1970s resentments built up amongst higher caste groups because of what was perceived as the tilt towards Scheduled Castes and "the rural poor themselves became divided along caste lines. Finally, the break-down in client-patron relations at the local level resulted in the failure of political communication and created a void which went unfilled in the absence of any new grass-roots party organisation" (p 285). Youth, educated middle classes, members of 'lower' castes and Kamma industrialists alike went in search of an alternative to Congress. Then in the early 1980s Mrs Gandhi's frequent interventions in Andhra politics, and a rapid succession of ineffectual chief ministers, built up resentments which were successfully exploited by the film star N T Rama Rao, who established a new political party, the Telugu Desam, and - stepping into the political vacuum created by the decline of the Congress, and the 'void' at local level - won office in the state in 1983 (see also Kohli 1988, and Vakil 1990, who confirm the analysis given by Ram Reddy). One charismatic leader (NTR) effectively replaced another (Indira Gandhi), but one was a national leader and the other regional: "It was (NTR's) charisma that dominated the electoral scene, rendering most of the organised political parties irrelevant" (p 286). The Telugu Desam offered 'to restore the dignity of the Telugu people'. The policies it proposed were frankly populist (notably promising rice at Rs2 per kilo), and attempted to accommodate youth, women and the 'lower' castes/classes - indicating "the continuity in political style". Indeed the interim budget passed by the TD immediately after it came to power shifted from irrigation and power development, which received an increased outlay of only 6 per cent, to social and community services, on which the outlay was increased by 30 per cent (see Pai 1996). The continuities in the leadership of the dominant 'middle' castes/classes is shown in studies of the composition of the Vidhan Sabha and of the state cabinet (though it is true that Kammas were more strongly represented under the Telugu Desam - NTR was himself a Kamma: see, in addition to Ram Reddy, Ambedkar 1990), and the representation of members of the 'lower' castes/classes in local government has been only gradual. Ram Reddy sums up: "While the parties in power changed, the stability of the polity continued. The success of a party seemed to lie in building a strong and charismatic personality on the one hand and carrying out populist policies on the other, capable of appealing to a broad spectrum of disadvantaged groups. [No new party organisation could be built to substitute horizontal mobilisation of the poor for vertical patron client networks ... (which) ... contributed to excessive dependence on a single charismatic leader and increasing centralisation of power; p287] As the politics of accommodation appeared to break down because of its own social contradictions [not all groups or aspirants to power can possibly be satisfied] another party emerged with a new charismatic leader and more expansive populist policies" (p 291). Sure enough NTR's Telugu Desam, though it retained office in 1985 after a badly bungled attempt by the Congress government at the centre to remove him, lost in the state in 1989 to Congress, even though by this stage Rajiv Gandhi's charisma had worn rather thin. The Congress government in the state was then defeated in turn in 1994 by the TD, which was able to highlight the issue of the distributional effects of the fiscal reforms which were by then being implemented in the country. The issue of subsidised rice was centrally important. The cheap rice scheme had been effectively run by the TDP before 1989, and the record of the Congress in running it was perceived as poor, not least because the price had been increased from Rs2 to Rs3.50 per kilo. Now the future of the TDP, under a new and somewhat charismatic leader, Chandrababu Naidu, is under threat as the scheme has been cut down in response the World Bank conditionality.

In sum: continuity in the dominance of 'middle' caste/class interests, but the populist programmes of the

Telugu Desam Party may represent a significant shift within the regime.

### ***Gujarat:***

The more complex caste-class structure of this state has made for politics which are even more Byzantine than is usual in India. Ghanshyam Shah comments: “the social situation in Gujarat is not quite clear. Caste as a social organisation ... is crumbling, though not disappearing. At the same time caste sentiments prevail in the intra-class conflicts among the poor farmers, agricultural labourers and industrial workers [in this relatively highly industrialised state with particularly extensive commercial agriculture] as well as the rich peasants and business class. While different classes cutting across caste boundaries are being formed, class consciousness as such is yet to develop. This situation works in favour of the upper classes of the dominant castes in perpetuating their hold over society”. (1990: 111). The state does not fit so clearly into the category of ‘a middle caste dominated regime’ as do Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra, because members of the upper castes - Brahmans and especially Baniyas, Patidars - a classic ‘middle’ caste in Church’s terms, exercising local dominance in parts of the state, and ‘Kshatriyas’ - who include both Rajputs and some Kolis, the most numerous caste group of the state (accounting for around a quarter of the population), who include large numbers of small and marginal farmers, and agricultural labourers, and can be defined as ‘lower’ caste, have all vied for power. As Wood argued (1984) the Congress-I was successful in the 1980s in establishing a power base by deploying the so-called ‘KHAM’ strategy which was presented by its own advocates in the party as a way of ‘uplifting’ disadvantaged members of society. ‘KHAM’ refers to ‘Kshatriya’ - including ‘lower’ caste Kolis, ‘Harijan’ (Scheduled Castes - around 7 per cent of the population), ‘Adivasis’ (Scheduled Tribes - around 18 per cent), and Muslims (another 8 per cent or more). Thus it was that Church defined Gujarat as a state in which ‘lower’ castes/classes had been recruited into Congress regimes, though it was already clear that the ‘KHAM’ strategy had exacerbated divisions within each of its constituent groups, with the worse-off amongst them being excluded from benefits. But it did mean, as both Shah and Wood have noted, that there was also a discrepancy between political power and social dominance in the state. The economy was dominated by Brahmans, Baniyas and Patidars, but political power was held mainly by Rajput and Koli ‘Kshatriyas’, and Wood remarked, insightfully, that “The haves, possessing social and economic power but excluded from access to political power in the Congress-I, appear to have nowhere to turn except to hopelessly weak and divided opposition parties, or to lawless behaviour” (1984: 221). He anticipated the violence and turbulent conflict which have characterised Gujarat’s politics over the last decade. But the ‘haves’ did find a party to turn to by the end of the decade, in the BJP. According to Shah’s account of it (1998), first the Jan Sangh and then the BJP have pursued a long-run strategy of building support in Gujarat, seeking to incorporate Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and ‘OBCs’ (‘lower’ castes in our terminology) under upper caste leadership. “The party has put the Dalit, tribal and OBC members in the forefront in various campaigns” (1998: 257), fielding significant numbers of OBC candidates in Vidan Sabha elections, whilst at the same time contriving never actively to support job reservations for them. And in 1991 as many as 63 per cent, still, of the state and district level leaders were from upper castes (Brahmans, Baniyas and Patidars). After the BJP took power in the state in 1995 it was rapidly split by a conflict between leaders which seemed to reflect traditional rivalry between Patidars and Rajputs-cum-Kolis. Shankarsinh Vaghela, himself a Rajput but with a base amongst Kolis, broke away to form the Rashtriya Janata Party, ruled for a time with Congress support and “tried with some success to emerge as a leader of the OBCs in Gujarat” (Shah: 265). But in the state elections in 1998 the polarisation on caste lines which Vaghela anticipated did not occur and the BJP won widespread support in a comprehensive victory (Vaghela has subsequently merged the RJP with Congress, arguing - curiously for one so recently a leader of the BJP - that his party had no ideological differences with Congress). The current chief minister, Keshubhai Patel, is now perceived, however, as favouring Patidars at the cost of ‘lower’ castes, and there are reports of trouble in the ruling party for this reason (*Frontline* June 18 1999).

In sum, there is little evidence to suggest that ‘lower’ castes/classes have won much political ground in

Gujarat, and the current ascendancy of the BJP is founded on 'the upper classes of the dominant castes'. But significant regime shifts may have occurred in the later 1970s and 1980s in the period of the 'KHAM' strategy and again in the mid-1990s with the assumption of power by the BJP, and the realignment of economic and political power.

### ***Karnataka:***

The politics of Karnataka, described by Manor as a state with a conservative social order, in which "the disparities in wealth, status and power have not been so severe as to undermine the comparative cohesiveness of society" (1989: 323) - later he argues that this 'cohesion' is "rooted in small peasant proprietorship" (p 331), have been dominated by Lingayats and Vokkaligas. Congress administrations led by Vokkaligas and Lingayats in the 1950s and 1960s are said to have carried out 'modest reforms', offering modest concessions to poorer groups (though it is possible that Manor has latterly over-emphasised the effectiveness of the land reforms of 1961, as well as those carried out in the times of the Urs administration in the 1970s: see Damle 1989). But by the late 1960s the solidarity of 'Lingayat raj' was being undermined by frustrations over access to patronage. This assisted Devaraj Urs' rise to power, which involved mobilisation of 'lower' caste/class groups in the 1970s. But Urs' regime, described as modestly 'progressive' by Manor (1980) and after him by Kohli, lacked organisational foundations and did not endure. Neither does it seem - in the light of subsequent events - that Urs sowed the seeds of radical change in Karnataka society in the way in which M N Srinivas and M N Pannini suggested when they wrote: "He succeeded in making the poorer sections realise that in a democracy not only should the government work for the welfare of the poor but also that it should be run by them" (1984: 73). The Congress-I was restored to power in 1980, under the leadership of Gundu Rao, who proceeded to govern with such bungling ineptitude (Manor saves his most cutting language for Gundu Rao) as to alienate "a vast array of important social groups" who then, in January 1983 "astonished India by rejecting a Congress government for the first time". According to Manor "Because so many alienated groups had turned to the opposition, the Janata government which took power in 1983 contained representatives of nearly every important social force in the state. Despite ill-informed and quite unsubstantiated cliches in sections of the Indian press, lingayats and vokkaligas have not succeeded in dominating that government" (this and the preceding quotations Manor 1989: 356). His view was that as a result of these events in the early 1980s, it was no longer possible for any single social force to dominate Karnataka politics, and he (correctly, as it has turned out) foresaw that politics in Karnataka might become increasingly unstable.

The local dominance of Lingayats and Vokkaligas may have persisted - this is quite clearly shown by Ray and Kumpatla's analysis of the social backgrounds of Zilla Parishad presidents in the mid-1980s, under the Janata government of the state (1987) - but they were no longer dominant, Manor maintained, as they had been at supra-local levels. He considered that "The problem of the Hegde government [after 1983] was not that they favoured locally dominant groups but that they risked spreading their resources too thinly by distributing largesse to nearly every sizeable group in the state" (1989: 357). Srinivas and Pannini had been even more positive about the character of the Hegde government, suggesting that it had "restored the bias that Urs gave to rural uplift and poverty eradication" (1984: 73). Ray and Kumpatla, however, found that in local government the representation of Lingayats and Vokkaligas was greater under Hegde than it had been in Urs' time and held that because the Janata had neither the will nor the capacity to challenge local power holders "the newly created powerful [panchayati raj] system of democratic decentralisation is unlikely to create substantial gains for the rural poor" (1987: 1825) - a finding which is broadly substantiated by Manor's own later work on panchayati raj in Karnataka, with Richard Crook. Crook and Manor argue that decentralisation in Karnataka has improved political participation and government performance, but, they say "Even (this) the most successful of our cases showed little evidence of having been particularly responsive to 'vulnerable groups', the poor or the marginalised" (1998: 301). In the Karnataka case there was no mechanism or political process for checking the exercise of local power, such as might be supplied, they imply - a la Kohli - by dominance in the political system of a leftist party.

We should not then “expect democratic decentralisation in India to assist in poverty alleviation over the short to medium term, unless the centralised system is dominated by a leftist party” (1998: 77). The Urs regime, and subsequently the Janata/Janata Dal *failed* (*pace* Srinivas and Pannini) to bring about radical change in Karnataka politics: “Hegde, like Urs, heads a party which has a loose ideological and organisational setting ... it has an incompatible leadership structure emanating mainly from discrete and pre-existing political backgrounds [The recurrent conflicts between the top leaders of the Janata, later Janata Dal in Karnataka - Hegde, Bommai and Deve Gowda, a Brahman, a Lingayat and a Vokkaliga - bear out this point]. The Janata party has no ideological commitment to the poor; its ideology can be spelled out only in terms of some generalities like democracy and decentralisation. The hold of the dominant landowning castes in the party is enormous. Its policies and programmes are not therefore intended to imperil the entrenched interests of the propertied classes as a whole ...” (Ray and Kumpatla 1987: 1830). Manor, and Kohli, in the light of their commentaries on the Urs’ government, might well argue that this is precisely the point - that these were regimes which were able to pursue modestly progressive agendas because - pursuing the politics of accommodation - they took a pragmatic attitude towards propertied classes. But it has yet to be demonstrated that they achieved lasting benefits for poorer people in Karnataka (and, at first glance, it would seem from the studies of Minhas-Jain-Tendulkar and Datt-Ravallion, that they did not). The 1994 elections to the state assembly in which Lingayats and Vokkaligas won, respectively, 29 and 24 per cent of the seats, show the persistence of their influence (see also Harold Gould’s analysis of the Janata Dal electoral strategy in the General Elections in the state in 1996, which confirms the point: Gould 1997).

In sum, it is not clear that ‘middle’ caste/class dominance has been shaken in Karnataka any more than it has been in Andhra or in Gujarat. It is possible that both the Urs and the Janata/Janata Dal regimes have been more ‘pro-poor’ than others, but it has yet to be shown that - if this was so - they have had much effect.

### ***Maharashtra:***

Jayant Lele, who has written extensively on the politics of Maharashtra, says of the Marathas that “In no other state do we find an ideologically guided and economically differentiated caste cluster of this size” (1990: 180); and Robert Jenkins sums up Lele’s views on the politics of the state as follows: “the Maratha caste cluster has constructed a system of elite-pluralist hegemony, which subsumes many unprivileged members of that caste cluster as well as other disadvantaged castes, and has cut short a ‘coalition of the disadvantaged’ ... this system is flexible enough to respond to most challenges of change” (1996: 210, note 12). Dalits have been more continuously and organised in Maharashtra than has been the case elsewhere in India, and in consequence perhaps there has been more ‘generous’ (Lele) accommodation of elites from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims than elsewhere, so that “They have developed a vested interest in the maintenance of the system [and, Lele says elsewhere, ‘Ambedkar’s project’ of low caste emancipation ‘is on the buffers’]... (while) ... Those from the Other Backward Classes .. have also realised that without control over land or trade, without a caste cluster ideology equivalent to that of the Marathas or Mahars [the most numerous Scheduled Caste] and without spatial concentrations, mobilising against Maratha hegemony or the Congress system cannot yield a lasting alternate system of rewards” (Lele 1989: 188). The government of Maharashtra was unable to provide satisfactory information to the Mandal Commission about the status of the ‘OBCs’ in the state, but there was also little in the way of ‘anti-reservation’ outbursts in Maharashtra in the 1980s (unlike Gujarat). The state’s widely celebrated Employment Guarantee Scheme, its most important anti-poverty programme, has played a significant part in ‘the system’, too: “Large part of the funds for the EGS is provided by the prosperous urban sector of the state... (the) politically powerful rural elite in the state succeeded in extracting finance from the urban sector for the GS in order to get benefits from the assets created in the rural areas [whilst also managing potential resistance: JH]” (Mahendra Dev 1995: 2674).

Another outcome of the system was that Congress rule proved most durable, amongst all the major states,

in Maharashtra, and until 1995 the party was only out of power there for two years (and even then, the government which ruled between 1978 and 1980, in the aftermath of the Emergency, included those who had been and who were to be again leaders of the Congress-I). The Vidhan Sabha elections of 1995 saw the first serious challenge to both Congress and Maratha dominance. The alliance of the BJP and the Shiv Sena won 29.1 per cent of the vote and (respectively) 64 and 73 seats against the Congress's 80 (from 30.9 per cent of the vote), bringing about the first change of regime. For the first time in the history of the state it had a real non-Congress government, and one not dominated by Marathas coming from rural areas. The caste composition of the Vidhan Sabha did not change very much in 1995, though its social character was changed in other ways. Maratha strength was maintained - but the kinds of Marathas who won were different from those who had held seats in previous assemblies. The Maratha Maha Sangh (a caste association) allied with the Shiv Sena, but successful Maratha candidates who won on the Shiv Sena ticket were young and had little or no support from Maharashtra's cooperatives or other institutions: "They are those disgruntled elements who are not absorbed in the local power structure by the clannish Marathas of the Congress" (Vora 1996: 173; points confirmed in Banerjee's analysis of the success of the BJP-Shiv Sena in the 1996 General Election, Banerjee 1997). The BJP's 64 MLAs "reflected the party's systematic strategy of transforming its upper -caste image" (Hansen 1998: 147). Only 10 were Brahmans and 24 came from the Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster.

A commentator argues that in India's most urbanised and industrialised state "the rural-based Congress is becoming irrelevant" (Vora 1996: 172), but the same writer goes on to suggest that crucial factors in the elections were Congress in-fighting, which meant that there were large numbers of rebel Congress candidates, and also the party's loss of support amongst Muslims (following the violence against Muslims in the Bombay riots of 1992-1993). Here, as elsewhere, the self-destruction of the Congress has played a significant, if not vital part in the rise of the BJP, and it is certainly still too early to write off the Congress as a political force in Maharashtra (though it will have been further damaged by the recent split between Sharad Pawar and Sonia Gandhi). But meanwhile there has been a change of party- regime for the first time in Maharashtra. The significance of this has yet to become apparent. On one level the BJP-Shiv Sena seems to accommodate different class interests very effectively, though in a different way from that which worked under the old Maharashtrian Congress System. The implications in the longer run of the challenge to Maratha dominance locally may be profound. But in terms of policy, at least in the short run, there has not been great deal of change.

### **C: States in which lower castes/classes have been more strongly represented**

[This section has yet to be completed. The following are notes on salient points and on some ideas which have yet to be tested against the available literature].

**Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal** are all three of them states which stand out, by comparison with the others which have been discussed here because their caste/class structures have historically been quite fragmented. In none of them was upper caste dominance as strongly entrenched as in the North (though Brahmans had positions of importance in all of them); none of them has 'middle' castes extending local dominance over wide areas, as is the case with the Marathas, the Reddys or the Lingayats and Vokkaligas. In all three there are strong indications of higher levels of political mobilisation and participation by 'lower' castes/classes than is true elsewhere. Papers in Wood (ed, 1984) substantiate this case for Kerala and West Bengal. Though the mobilisation of lower castes/classes is in both cases associated with the organisational and electoral strength of the CPI(M) there clearly are significant differences between them. Accounts show much more extensive organisation in civil society in Kerala (see for example Nag 1989), and there is a great deal of political competition there. The CPI(M) has become rather monolithic in

West Bengal. I go along neither with Kohli's bullishness about the regime, nor with Mallick's criticism. Echeverri-Gent (1995) supports some of Kohli's arguments, showing that the CPI(M)'s rejuvenation of the panchayats has been a fundamentally democratic reform, and arguing that they have a transformative potential. But he accepts that Mallick is right about the way in which they are dominated by a rural middle class (though a 'middle class' rather than 'landed interests'). Rogaly (1998) has shown that the Left Front Government led by the CPI(M) has not been particularly pro-labour, whilst also recognising achievements in regard to reduction of poverty. Not a simple story. But the idea of 'stronger representation of lower castes/classes' can be supported. More problematic in the case of Tamil Nadu. Politics are quite clearly not upper caste/class dominated as in (say) MP, or middle caste/class dominated as in (e.g) Maharashtra, but the DMK/ADMK regime has a petit bourgeois rather than working class character. Kohli's observations in Madurai suggest that the DMK became deradicalised, failed to build institutional roots (beyond the MGR Fan Clubs), and failed to deliver on its anti-Centre, anti-Brahman and pro-poor goals - which "slowly brought to the fore a ruler elected primarily by virtue of his personal appeal" (1990: 182). Washbrook's view, similarly, is that: "the AIADMK regime was one of bread (or rice) and circuses (or movies) and in broad political terms, might be conceived as a form of Bonapartist or Caesarian democracy. Classically, the bourgeoisie, or the elite of wealth, withdrew from a formal position of control over the state apparatus and the constitutional political process. Not only was their direct control no longer necessary for the purposes of capital accumulation but their attempt to exercise it ... provoked resistance and instability. Formal control was transferred to [I would rather put it, 'was assumed by'] a cadre of professional political managers who on the basis of a populist ideology, mollified resistance by turning what was left of the state into a welfare agency and by siring up feelings of patriotism and atavism" (1989: 258). I rather agree with this. It points to a distinction between 'populist' and 'clientelist' politics (cf Mouzelis).

## **5. Regime Differences, Factors That Influence Poverty Reduction, and Pro-Poor Policies**

Patterns of State-Level Public Expenditure:

It would be nice now to go on to show that, corresponding with these political regime differences, there are systematic variations in the resourcing of agricultural infrastructure (including irrigation), and the social services (basic education and primary health care) - both of which we know exercise a great deal of influence on poverty reduction, directly and indirectly - as well as in the adoption of specifically pro-poor policies and programmes. But public accounts rarely tell such straightforward stories, and an examination of trends in state public expenditure, on the Revenue and Capital Accounts, provides no exception to this general rule<sup>18</sup>. The story is complicated, anyway, because

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<sup>18</sup> I am extremely grateful to David Hall-Mathews for his valiant and conscientious efforts to record and to make some sense of these data - though David is exonerated from any responsibility for what follows here.

of the powers of the central government, referred to earlier, and by the influence of bureaucratic conventions on the management of the state budgets, and the way in which they are accounted for. These conventions seem to vary somewhat from state to state, but also contribute to the impression of continuity between different administrations in each state<sup>19</sup>. It is extremely difficult, indeed, from the accounts alone, without a lot of supplementary information, to trace how states fund particular schemes such as the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra or the Noon Meals Scheme in Tamil Nadu. The following observations are based on an examination of the state-level accounts for eight states (AP, Karnataka, Kerala, MP, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal).

Figure 1 shows that variations over time in spending per capita on the Revenue Account (current prices) between the eight states have been rather constant. Expenditure has been highest, save for two years in the early 1990s, in the high income state of Maharashtra, which has been consistently ahead of the middle income states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, which have usually spent rather more than the other middle income state of Andhra Pradesh, which has been ahead, in turn, of the low income states of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, as well as middle income West Bengal (whose low level of expenditure is striking, given that its SDP per capita, between 1973 and 1986, followed Maharashtra's and Gujarat's, and was distinctly higher than those of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh: see Srivastava 1993, Table 2a). The two years of exceptionally high expenditure in Tamil Nadu are those of the beginning of Jayalalitha's ADMK administration which had ambitious popular programmes.

Table 1, above, shows that the level of developmental expenditure per capita in the different states follows the same trend as for all expenditure on the Revenue Account, which is hardly surprising given that, as Figure 2 shows, developmental expenditure has accounted for between 65 and 75 per cent of all expenditure on the Revenue Account (though this proportion has been declining in the 1990s, notably in Kerala and West Bengal).

In all the states the most important single item of developmental spending is Education; and the quinquennial average percentages of the developmental budget allocated to this head are shown in Table 3:

*Table 3: Proportion of developmental expenditure on EDUCATION*

80/1 to 84/5	85/6 to 89/90	90/1 to 94/5	95/6 to 97/8*
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<sup>19</sup> Is it entirely a coincidence that, as I have calculated quinquennial averages for parts of the states' developmental expenditure, I have found that the proportion of total expenditure allocated to the various heads in the following year often corresponds well with the preceding quinquennial average?

Andhra Pradesh	27.67	26.27	26.2	24.36
Karnataka	28.64	29.38	29.53	28.27
Kerala	44.34	42.75	42.91	40.1
Madhya Pradesh	24.15	25.21	26.1	25.46
Maharashtra	28.22	27.7	29.94	31.79
Orissa	27.0	30.66	30.79	33.2
Tamil Nadu	27.67	29.79	27.05	31.6
West Bengal	33.15	35.92	38.7	37.94

source: calculated from data given in RBI Bulletins, various issues

\* note that the figures for 96/97 and 97/98 are the budget estimates, others are from the accounts .

Kerala, followed by West Bengal, has consistently spent a greater share on education than other states, and Madhya Pradesh and, latterly especially, Andhra Pradesh, rather less than others. Taking account of the differences in levels of development expenditure per capita these proportional allocations mean that Kerala has been spending about twice as much on education, per person, as Madhya Pradesh. Figures for two selected years, for illustrative purposes, are shown in Table 4:

*Table 4: Expenditure per capita on EDUCATION (Rs, current prices)*

	1980/81	1990/91
Andhra Pradesh	42.69	150.69
Karnataka	45.98	177.39
Kerala	88.36	264.33
Madhya Pradesh	32.48	136.58
Maharashtra	60.16	218.25
Orissa	40.37	141.78
Tamil Nadu	48.95	229.02
West Bengal	44.64	200.08

source: calculated from accounts given in RBI Bulletins, various issues

[note that, according to data presented by Jalan and Subbarao 1995, Figure 1 per capita expenditure in UP and Bihar has been about the same as that of MP]

The well known bias towards social expenditure in Kerala appears very clearly in these data, and it is followed by West Bengal though, because of lower levels of development expenditure per capita in West Bengal this state is outstripped in absolute terms by both Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The level of expenditure on education in Andhra Pradesh, relatively and absolutely, seems rather low, which corresponds with the state's comparatively poor record in terms of human development objectives (referred to, for example, by Parthasarathy 1995). But though there are some clear differences between states in terms of the relative and absolute allocations of resources to education, it is not possible to make clear distinctions between party regimes within states. For example: the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh in the second half of the 1980s, and the Congress government of the state in the first half of the 1990s spent more or less the same proportions of the developmental budget on education, as did the Janata Dal and the Congress administrations in Karnataka over the same two periods, or the Congress and Janata Dal governments in Orissa.

Allocations of developmental expenditure on medical and health services vary rather little between these eight states, usually being around 12 per cent, somewhat higher (14 to 15 per cent) in West Bengal, Kerala, and (less predictably, perhaps) Madhya Pradesh. Again, no particular variations are observed between party regimes in any of the eight states. Allocations of expenditure to agriculture, irrigation and to community development (and these three heads, with education and medical and health expenditure, together make up around two-thirds of all developmental expenditure on the Revenue Budget) vary more between states, though in none of them in at all a distinctive way between quinquennial periods, or between party-regimes. Expenditure from the Revenue Budget on irrigation is higher in Andhra (between 11 and 12 per cent), Maharashtra (10 to 11 per cent) and in Karnataka (around 8.5 per cent) than in other states, where it has generally been less than five per cent. The spend on agriculture has been higher than that on irrigation in all states, save for Andhra Pradesh, though in all states it has been declining in relative terms (in line with the general finding of decline in investment in agricultural infrastructure: see Mohan Rao 1993). It has been above average in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and, until recently, in Maharashtra too. Community development (also described as 'rural development') expenditure has consistently been higher in Andhra (about

11 per cent) and West Bengal (10 per cent) than in other states, and consistently low in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. But (see Figure 3) Tamil Nadu has spent more than 4 per cent of its developmental outlays on Nutrition since the early 1980s, which is when the then chief minister, M G Ramachandran, introduced his 'Nutritious Noon Meals Scheme' (which became one of the most significant nutrition interventions anywhere in the world); Andhra Pradesh seems to have followed suit after the return of the Telugu Desam to office in the mid-1990s; and Karnataka increased its nutrition spending at the time of the Janata government in the 1980s.

It is difficult to make much of a story of these observations, though it appears that 'economic' expenditure on irrigation and agriculture has formed a higher percentage of the total in Maharashtra followed by Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. and that Kerala and West Bengal have generally spent rather less than the other states under these heads on the Revenue Account. The story of spending on Nutrition, alone, stands out.

Turning to the Capital Account, the most important single item of capital outlay in most states in most years has been irrigation. The following Table shows the quinquennial average proportion of all disbursements on the Capital Account going to irrigation:

*Table 5: Outlays on Irrigation on the Capital Account (% of all disbursements)*

	80/1 to 84/5	85/6 to 89/90	90/1 to 94/5	95/6 to 97/8
Andhra Pradesh	28.75	34.75	30.07	27.3
Karnataka	22.68	23.8	33.69	45.57
Kerala	20.9	13.06	14.03	15.7
Madhya Pradesh	23.1	40.53	29.52	24.4
Maharashtra	25.77	27.14	27.9	31.45
Orissa	36.99	30.53	22.7	35.06
Tamil Nadu*	4.6	5.5	5.9	7.2
West Bengal	8.06	8.5	10.7	10.1

Source: calculated from data in RBI Bulletins, various issues

note: \* Tamil Nadu's account appears very different from the others because such a high proportion of disbursements on the Capital Account goes to 'Loans by the State'.

It may be significant that the share of irrigation investment in all disbursements on the Capital Account (as on the Revenue Account) is lower in Kerala, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu than in other states. Indeed, the main conclusion which it seems to be possible to draw from this examination is that these three states do indeed give greater emphasis in their spending to social expenditure, spending more relatively and in the case of Kerala and Tamil Nadu (probably) absolutely as well, than a high income state such as Maharashtra.

The Poverty Alleviation Programme<sup>20</sup>:

What is described (for example by Vyas and Bhargava) as India's 'Poverty Alleviation Programme', with its three major components of (i) the Integrated Rural Development Programme, which aims to put productive assets into the hands of the poor, (ii) the rural public works/employment programme, Jawahar Rozgar Yohana, and (iii) the Public Distribution System, intended in part to allow the poor (the great majority of whom must purchase their food) to secure food at low prices, is a programme of the central government. By the mid-1990s the JRY alone accounted for half of all central government funds for rural development (which increased quite dramatically from an outlay of Rs 3100 crore in 1992-93 to a budgeted outlay of Rs 7700 crore in 1995-96). Under the scheme the central government pays for 80 per cent of JRY expenditures while the states fund 20 per cent of the programme (see Echeverri-Gent 1995: xv). The financial and administrative arrangements are much the same in the case of IRDP. So in regard to these important pro-poor programmes, the role of the states is principally in implementation. Are there differences in performance which are politically determined<sup>21</sup>?

Echeverri-Gent reproduces data from the Department of Rural Development, Government of India, on 'NREP [National Rural Employment Programme - the main predecessor of the JRY] resources utilised as a percentage of resource available annually' (1995, Table 7, p 145)/ The average for the period 1981/82 to 1988/89 is 95 per cent for Punjab and Tamil Nadu, 94 per cent for MP and over 80 per cent for all the major states, saving Assam and West Bengal alone. West Bengal used only 74 per cent of the NREP resources which were available. Echeverri-Gent discusses this observation at length, and argues that the shortfall came about because NREP was implemented in West Bengal through the panchayats, which "has attenuated administrative accountability" (1995: 145). He continues: "Given the scope of poverty in West Bengal, the inability of panchayats to absorb more NREP funding is a blemish on their poverty alleviation record" (1995: 147). But otherwise, these data do not show all that much variation in performance between states.

Variation in performance is most marked with regard to the Public Distribution System. Offtake under the scheme is in fact very low in the 'BIMARU' states which have the highest concentration of poverty:

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<sup>20</sup> NB: There is more to be found out and said here, but not all the relevant reports of the Government of India are available in the UK, and I have not so far had access to some others which are.

<sup>21</sup> It is not part of my purpose here to assess the effectiveness of these programmes. There is an abundant literature on this topic. See for example, articles in B.Harriss, Guhan and Cassen, eds, 1992

Table 6: Allocation and Offtake under the PDS in Selected States 1995-96

	% of unlifted quantity to total allocation		
	Rice	Wheat	Total
AP	17.59	46.51	19.56
Bihar	93.84	67.80	76.94
MP	64.8	76.59	70.71
Orissa	53.7	43.19	50.05
Rajasthan	82.5	68.4	68.9
Tamil Nadu	0.13	47.61	7.9
UP	61.88	80.95	74.91

source: Ministry of Civil Supplies data tabulated by Thamarajakshi 1997, Table 13, p 1897

By 1995-96 Andhra Pradesh accounted for 23.6 per cent of rice distributed through the PDS, Tamil Nadu 17.3 per cent, Kerala 12.8 per cent and Karnataka 10.3 per cent, while West Bengal accounted for 16.4 per cent of the wheat and Maharashtra 11.9 per cent (Thamarajakshi 1997: 1896). Thamarajakshi presents other data which show that in these states (not including Maharashtra), and Gujarat (only just), the share in PDS wheat and rice (15.8% in AP, 12.2% TN, 12.1% Kerala, 8.1% Karnataka) is higher than their share of the poor population of the country (1997, Table 17, p 1899) - but this has been achieved through subsidies which keep the PDS price below the open market price, and ensure that PDS grain accounts for relatively high levels of total consumption (around a quarter in AP and TN). But the cost is high, not least - Thamarajakshi suggests - in terms of public investment in agriculture foregone<sup>22</sup>. Latterly, as the Government of Andhra Pradesh has dealt independently with the World Bank, it has made commitments to cut back on its subsidised rice scheme in response to conditionality (see above). But no matter what the arguments for and against food subsidies, it is striking that they have played a prominent role in some states very much more than in others, and notably in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, followed by Karnataka and Gujarat.

The significance of these subsidies is pointed up by Parthasarathy in his study of public intervention and rural poverty in Andhra Pradesh (1995). The case of this state ‘presents a paradox of high and growing proletarianisation [increasing numbers and incidence of agricultural labourers and marginal farmers], lower rate of agricultural growth [2.53 per cent annum in 1979/80 to 1988/89, as opposed to 3.26 per cent in 1971/72 to 1978-79, according to his data] and declining pauperisation’ (1995: 2574). How has it come about that the incidence of poverty has gone on decreasing even while the rate of growth of foodgrains production went down? Parthasarathy estimates that the per capita incomes of the rural poor would have been less by 9 per cent in 1987-88 in the absence of public intervention, through the subsidised rice scheme (the ‘Rs2 per kilo’

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<sup>22</sup> Parikh also presents data showing the contribution of the PDS to cereals purchases amongst the rural bottom 20 per cent of households, and the level of subsidy. He, too, is critical of the PDS for its inefficiency in regard to poverty reduction (1998).

scheme) and employment programmes. “Andhra’s PDS in rural areas [in much of India the PDS is still confined largely to urban areas] has been most popular” (p 2585), in spite of problems in the delivery system. It has been successful, he concludes, in maintaining the reduction of poverty in the state - but in a way which is not sustainable: “The rising subsidies at fixed supply price have put an enormous strain on resources. It is reported that expenditure on irrigation and power was not at the desired level because of the rising costs of public distribution” (p 2585). Meanwhile the increasing incidence of urban poverty, possibly due to the migration of the rural poor, suggests that the sustainability of the reduction in rural poverty is doubtful.

This Andhra story repeats in its essentials the earlier story of such subsidised state hand-outs in Tamil Nadu, especially under the regime of M G Ramachandran, the film-star chief minister who was the mentor of N T Rama Rao in Andhra. Washbrook writes of ‘MGR’ that “he tried to feed the poor and to protect the weak on a scale never seen before - regularly battling with the agencies of the Central Government to obtain funds for his Midday Meals Scheme and for bailing out a variety of indigent groups. MGR’s generosity did much to keep lower income families in the Dravidian political fold” (1989: 258). (Just as NTR’s did for the Telugu Desam’s fold). The incidence of poverty in Tamil Nadu continued to decline in the 1970s and the early 1980s (when the Noon Meals Scheme was introduced) in spite of a particularly low rate of growth of crop yields. But the extent of government expenditure in Tamil Nadu on welfare subsidies certainly constrained productive investments and restrained the rate of growth in the state (which was one of the lowest amongst the major states between 1970-73 and 1982-85: see Srivastava 1993, Table 2a; and in general on Tamil Nadu’s public finances, Guhan 1990).

The same story was repeated, though much less strikingly so in Karnataka where, Vyasalu notes, public expenditure in the anti-poverty programme has been weighted towards ‘relief’ (1995: 2641). Karnataka has had a tolerably high rate of growth of crop yields and of agricultural output (see Bhalla and Singh’s analysis, 1997), but increases in labour absorption have been lower than Andhra and Gujarat, and growth in labour productivity low, as have increases in real wages in agriculture (see data from analyses by Sheila Bhalla and A V Jose, summarised in Harriss 1992). Agricultural growth in the state has, therefore, been less ‘pro-poor’ than elsewhere, and it seems that the anti-poverty programme - in spite of expenditure on the PDS - has been less effective than has been the case in either AP or Tamil Nadu in maintaining poverty reduction (according to Minhas et al the head count ratio increased by 1.1 per cent per annum between 1983 and 1987-88, when it decreased by 2.3 per cent in Tamil Nadu and by 2.2 per cent in Andhra). In Gujarat, too, in spite of state expenditure on the PDS, and the introduction of an innovative scheme using mobile vans to reach out to remote areas, the incidence of poverty increased during a period of agricultural downturn in the 1980s. Indira Hirway summed up: “though Gujarat has made additional efforts to help the poor by introducing innovative programmes and schemes, the scale of their operation is quite small. Though a few of the programmes (like the PDS) have made some impact, the rest of the programmes appear to be mainly for display” (1995:).

## 6. Conclusions On Regime Differences And Their Significance

This discussion of variations between states in their use of the PDS provides a useful starting point. It is one which is well summed up by Vyasalu: “Given the spectrum of policies available to the policy-maker to help the poor, governments with non-radical democratic regimes find it both easy and politically convenient to adopt an anti-poverty strategy relying primarily on relief measures. The relief measures produce immediate and palpable benefits for the poor, evoke less resistance from the rich, and are within the capacity of a rule-cum-procedure bound bureaucracy to set up and administer” (1995: 2641). It is interesting then to reflect upon which of the major states have most strikingly pursued such anti-poverty strategies.

They are the three states which were distinguished as having regimes in which lower castes/classes are more strongly represented, but most notably Tamil Nadu with its form of Bonapartist democracy (as Washbrook refers to it); and amongst the states described as having middle caste/class regimes, particularly **Andhra Pradesh**, less so Karnataka and Gujarat. The N T Rama Rao regime in Andhra had a lot in common with that of M G Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu, relying on the projection of a frankly populist programme by a charismatic leader [“The success of a party seemed to lie in building a strong and charismatic personality ... and carrying out populist policies, capable of appealing to a broad spectrum of disadvantaged groups”, Ram Reddy, cited above]. Though the economic and political dominance of the middle castes/classes of Andhra Pradesh, the Reddys and the Kammas, remains strong, it is also true that the state has a history of poor peasant and agricultural labourers’ movements and organisation (remember that it was thought quite possible that the CPI would take power there in the first state assembly elections, and that there are still significant pockets which are controlled by leftist groups). The populist programmes of charismatic leaders, first Indira Gandhi and then NTR, are reported as having filled the kind of a vacuum created by the break-down in patron-client relations at the local level, and the weakening of the hold of rich peasant over local ‘vote-banks’<sup>23</sup>. In this situation, in order to win office and to keep it the Telugu Desam, which doesn’t have much of a local party organisation to speak of, has had to outbid the Congress in carrying out populist policies. We saw that the return of the TD to office in 1994 depended significantly upon its record in running the ‘rice Rs2 per kilo’ scheme, and that its current electoral prospects appear to be threatened by the proposed curtailment of that scheme (see *Frontline* June 18 1999). This kind of scheme has a political visibility which investment in primary education does not have. Such investment is also not particularly attractive to dominant middle castes who have access to private schooling. The politics of Andhra Pradesh, then, account for the

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<sup>23</sup> Kohli writes of Guntur, the district he studied in Andhra, that “it is clear that the superior social positioning of the so-called dominant castes no longer commands the respect and authority that would enable them to influence the political behaviour of those beneath them .... a member of the Reddy elite of Guntur cannot expect to easily convince the members of the backward and scheduled castes in the village to vote for him simply because of his higher caste status. Backward and scheduled castes have emerged as significant political forces in their own right. As this has happened, the old seemingly consensual pattern of politics that revolved around dominant caste leaders and their dependent followers has unravelled” (1990: 91).

apparent paradox that the state should, apparently, have done well in ‘reducing poverty’, whilst having a relatively poor record in ‘human development’.

The situation in **Karnataka** has been significantly different. According to observers such as Manor and Kohli the local dominance of Lingayats and Vokkaligas remains stronger than that of the erstwhile ‘dominant castes’ of Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu. In regard to Belgaun, the district he studied in Karnataka, Kohli writes of the “relative quiescence in the local social structure” by comparison with the situations that he observed in Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. ‘Relative quiescence’ was explained, he argued, because “the local patterns of domination exhibit more continuity with the past” (1990: 119). This is Manor’s theme, too, and he also comments on the dearth of historical or contemporary evidence of the kind of agrarian political mobilisation which has occurred in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. “Karnataka does not seem to have”, he says, “the most crucial precondition to a transformation of social perceptions and relations: a substantial ‘critical mass’ of landless agricultural labourers, a large proportion of whom are members of Scheduled Castes” (1989: 358). In this context, too, there have not been the conditions, nor the same space or opportunity for the emergence of charismatic populist political leadership like that of Andhra or Tamil Nadu (though he is described as having pursued either mildly progressive or populist policies Devaraj Urs was a machine politician, not at all comparable with NTR or MGR). Karnataka’s politics have continued to involve struggles for office between a number of mainly Lingayat and Vokkaliga politicians drawing on support from local notables. The ‘radical social change’ which Srinivas and Pannini (and at one point, Manor too) envisaged as resulting from the mobilisations of lower castes by Devaraj Urs has not materialised. So the nature of the political regime goes some way to accounting for its singularity - especially amongst the southern states - as a middle income state, which has had a reasonable agricultural growth rate, but a poor record in reducing poverty and a middling one in regard to human development. It is at least possible that the fact that local dominance persists more strongly here accounts for the observation that in real agricultural wage rates rose less here than in most other states (at least in the early 1980s, according to Jose’s data, referred to above), given the evidence that those who are locally powerful able to ‘bid down’ wage rates (see Lipton and Longhurst, on ‘responsive wage deceleration’; discussed in Harriss 1992: 200). At the same time, as I have suggested, there have not been the same political pressures as have existed in Andhra and Tamil Nadu, for the distribution of subsidised food. The “lack of any major progress with irrigation projects” under any of the governments of Karnataka, on which Manor also comments (1989: 325) may also have been influenced by the persistence of dominance (though the relationships between local dominance, modes of surplus appropriation in agriculture and technical change are not at all clear-cut).

The other two states which were distinguished as having ‘middle caste/class regimes’ - **Gujarat and Maharashtra** - are both high income states, with relatively high levels of public developmental expenditure. The comparison of their performance in poverty reduction, both with each other, and with AP and Karnataka, is uncertain, given that different authorities come to different conclusions. But if we follow Datt-Ravallion then it seems that Gujarat has done better than Maharashtra, which they distinguish as the state in which the growth process has been “associated with less favourable distributed impacts from the point of view of the poor” (1998: 23). This seems wholly unsurprising given the evidence of the entrenchment of Maratha dominance locally (compare with what has been

said about that of Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka), and, until the very recent past, of rural Marathas in state-level politics. Ambedkar, in spite of his efforts to organise the powerless in the state “failed even to initiate changes in the existing patterns of dominance” (Lele 1990: 167), and though there have been “many attempts to organise poor peasants and agricultural workers for higher wages or better inputs, so far they have produced few state-wide pressures on the government” (1990: 175). This has been the state, *par excellence*, of Congress rural machine politics. The performance of the agricultural economy has, however, been comparatively poor (according to Bhalla and Singh), labour absorption (according to Sheila Bhalla’s analysis) has been lower than in Andhra and Gujarat, and the growth of real wages in agriculture fairly low - such growth as there has been has not been particularly ‘pro-poor’, therefore. At the same time the Congress party-regime has not been under the same pressures to appeal to disadvantaged groups by such populist means as the distribution of subsidised food; and its outstanding anti-poverty programme, the EGS, has fitted nicely in with dominant rural class interests and been paid for from urban taxation (as was pointed out by Mahendra Dev, cited above, and before him by Herring and Edwards). For all the stresses of Congress factional politics in Maharashtra, the political regime has been stable, while the politics of Gujarat have been much more turbulent, as I argued above. The argument is confirmed, again, by Kohli’s observations in the district that he studied in Gujarat, Kheda - where Myron Weiner, twenty years before, thought that he had found “a model of organizational rationality and modernity” (Kohli 1990: 57). But here: “Political conflicts among local groups have intensified; the stability of electoral coalitions has declined; the legitimacy of those occupying political offices has come to be widely questioned; political conflicts often lead to violence ... The [mainly lower caste] Kshatriyas were mobilised primarily to win elections. Once they came to control political offices, their alienation from the [middle caste] Patidars was complete. As the Kshatriyas have sought to use state power to improve their socio-economic status, increasing their educational opportunities and obtaining jobs via reservations, the conflict between these communities has intensified and often has led to violence” (1990: 59). Dominance, it seems, has disintegrated to a much greater extent in Gujarat than in Maharashtra or Karnataka. Perhaps because of the ferocity of the competition between powerful caste/class groups which has resulted there has not been the same space or opportunity for charismatic populist leadership as in Andhra Pradesh, but governments have pursued some popular policies, particularly by ensuring wide access to the PDS. The place that might have been taken by a populist regional party has now been occupied by the BJP. If Datt-Ravallion are right about Gujarat’s strong performance in reducing poverty then this is likely to have been because of a relatively pro-poor pattern of agricultural growth (with labour absorption, growth in labour productivity and wages all having been relatively high) supplemented by access to subsidised PDS commodities.

The kinds of popular pressures which appear to have been effective in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, as well as in Kerala, and to an extent in Karnataka and perhaps in Gujarat, in making for the adoption of populist but pro-poor policies have generally been lacking in **Orissa and Madhya Pradesh**, or the other low income states of North India. None of these states has high profile programmes like the subsidised rice scheme in Andhra, and none of them, with the partial exception of Orissa, on Datt and Ravallion’s account, has at all a strong record in regard to poverty reduction. That of Uttar Pradesh is perhaps particularly poor, given its irrigation endowment and history of relatively high growth in crop yields over time (in other words, of ‘structural’ conditions which might

have been expected to have been conducive to poverty reduction). We have seen that all these states have remained locked into an historically deep-rooted spiral of low incomes and low levels of investment which the central government has been unable to change through the interventions of the Planning Commission and the Finance Commissions. Politically both Orissa and MP have continued to the present to be dominated by upper castes, and leaders of their substantial Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste populations have been effectively accommodated, bought-off within the 'spoils system' of politics. According to Datt-Ravallion there has been a higher rate of reduction in poverty in Orissa than in Madhya Pradesh. If so (and Minhas et al reach the opposite conclusion across the two periods they have studied) it is probably as a result of the greater extent of irrigation in Orissa, and higher rates of growth of labour absorption in agriculture and of labour productivity (Sheila Bhalla's estimates). It is a problem, however, for this analysis, that Bhalla and Singh's results suggest that the growth of crop yields in Orissa has been low by comparison with most other states, including MP. Orissa was, in the 1970s and 1980s, a somewhat poorer state (in terms of SDP per capita) than was MP, but it has contrived to manage slightly higher developmental spending, and to allocate more of it to education. Madhya Pradesh has left unlifted, according to the data reproduced by Thamarajakshi, a large part of its allocation of wheat and rice under the PDS. Orissa used a larger share of its allocation, but the evidence (both that given by Thamarajakshi and by Parikh) suggests that even fewer households in Orissa than in MP use the PDS. Given the available information (these are both states which have been very much less researched than the others considered in this paper) it is difficult to arrive at a clear comparative picture. If it is the case that Orissa really has done better than MP - perhaps by being more responsive to the needs of poorer people in public expenditure - then it is possible that further research will show the influence of Biju Patnaik's long-run quest to build up a diverse base of political support.

[Notes on other points which may be considered: (i) in general the arguments here support the view that the structure and functioning of 'local (agrarian) power', and the relations of local and state-level power-holders, do exercise a significant influence on policy processes and development outcomes, and also show that they differ between states; (ii) so, versus Vyas-Bhargava, and with Kohli, I think these findings show that politics does 'make a difference', though within the tight constraints of long-running historical path dependence in patterns of economic and social development; (iii) these Indian states show up differences between 'populist' (Andhra, TN) and 'clientelist' regimes (Maharashtra, Karnataka). They are likely to go different ways in their pursuit of poverty alleviation. 'Populism' delivers welfare in the short term, but what are its middle and longer run implications? TN and AP have managed tolerably well because they have also had quite rapidly growing agricultural economies (TN again in the last decade)?; (iv) there is more to be said, no doubt, about the differences in local 'participation' e.g between Kerala, West Bengal and Karnataka; (v) the findings maybe offer support, though muted, for Kohli's 1987 arguments about the kind of regime which is likely to support pro-poor policies, but a great deal depends on what he refers to as the pattern of 'decentralisation-centralisation' - in other words the relations of central and local power]

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