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Populism-I:
Politics, Policies and Social Justice

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2019

Contain

Populism as a Crisis of the Liberal Script: Reflections on Politics and Policy in India

Amit Prakash *

The term 'populism' has been used to describe contemporary politics across the world – from the political process leading to the Trump presidency in the United States to Erdoğan's transformation from a reformist to authoritarian leader,[1] to Putin's control over the Russian state apparatus. However, populism is not a temporarily limited phenomenon and Perón's Argentina, Indira Gandhi's politics of *garibi hatao*, and even Jacobian politics of France has been described as populist. However, essential features of populist politics is a subject of debate in the scholarly literature and is invoked for a wide variety of political phenomenon – from economic prolificacy of public authorities to confessional politics; and, from 'sons of the soil' premises of political articulation to claims of unique nationhood. Even the 'Occupy' movements in various parts of the world have been described as populist.[2] Closer home, the political process around the emergence and election of Aam Admi Party in Delhi and the three-decade-long political mobilisation by the Bharatiya Janata party and its electoral victory in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, have all been described as populist politics.
The malleability of the term notwithstanding, more recent usage encapsulates the angst of liberals about illiberal masses being mobilised on narrow partisan planks like xenophobia and insular nationalism; or, concerns about rising technocratic control of governance processes, including vast swathes of (mostly, economic) decision-making being insulated from democratic accountability.[3]

In light of the above, it is therefore postulated that the meaning and implications of the term populism cannot be derived only from political practise or from the visible political phenomenon. Furthermore, it is postulated that populism is not the converse of liberalism, as is often presumed. On the contrary, at least the contemporary expressions of the phenomenon of populism, is deeply connected to the theory and practise of liberalism. Further, the phenomenon cannot be understood and theorised upon using the standard liberal tools of empirical investigation as a basis of theory-building. In its stead, a counter-factual mode of enquiry is indicated as most fruitful.

In pursuit of such an enquiry, the paper is divided into three sections. The first section reflects on the crisis of liberal theory that not only gives a more concrete meaning to the idea of populism but also provides tools for a deeper enquiry, including its relations with the particular brand of contemporary liberalism − neoliberalism. The second section will attempt to substantiate the formulation arrived at in the first section while the third section will interrogate some of the blind spots of liberal theory with respect to social diversity before arriving at a concluding note.

I

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Liberalism has been seen as a framework for organising the political process while prioritising individual rights, liberty and equality of citizens. Alongside, liberalism may also be seen as a set of promissory notes emerging from a complexly negotiated social contract in each society, the attractiveness of which has been underlined by its geographic and temporal spread. However, liberalism is also a set of broken promises under the conditions of contemporary finance capital; belying legitimate democratic concerns — about increased participation, better deliberation, or proportional equity for all. Populism speaks to such belied expectations and constructs the trope of an unopposed homogenous popular will, with promises to deliver on these belied promises.

Understanding Populism as Crises of the Liberal Script

Populist politics is fundamentally related to the nature and character of modern liberal democracy but not quite clear what is modern about such democracy apart from the creation and operation of liberal representative institutions of government in the face of impracticality of direct democracy. It is therefore important to unbundle these concepts to underline the

> … distinction between two aspects: on one side, democracy as a form of rule, that is, the principle of the sovereignty of the people; and on the other side, the symbolic framework within which this democratic rule is exercised … [W]hat makes it [democracy] properly 'modem', [is] the old democratic principle that 'power should be exercised by the people' … within a symbolic framework informed by the liberal discourse, [of] … the value of individual liberty and on human rights. Those values are central to the liberal tradition and they are constitutive of the modern view of the world. Nonetheless, one should not make them part and parcel of the democratic tradition whose core values, equality and popular sovereignty, are different. Indeed, the separation between church and state, between the realm of the public and that of the private, as well as the very idea of the *Rechtstaat*, which are central to the politics of liberalism, do not have their origin in the democratic discourse but come from elsewhere …
>
> … [T]he liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; [and,] the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty [have] … no necessary relation [and are] only a contingent historical articulation. Through such an articulation, … , liberalism was democratized and democracy liberalized … [W]hile we tend today to take the link between liberalism and democracy for granted, their union, far from being a smooth process, was the result of bitter struggles … [4]

Inability of the liberal script to reconcile (perhaps, consciously ignore) these tensions has had multifarious impacts. Foremost is the widely commented upon 'democratic deficit' – a condition wherein the liberal script emphasising questions of equality and popular sovereignty is often seen to be irrelevant to the mechanics of democracy keen to stress upon individual liberty and rule of law. It is not accidental that the latter two phrases are popular with the neoliberal recommendations too!

Close together is the inability of this tension to reconcile claims of a social community with the tropes of modern liberal democracy. The record of liberal democracy in reconciling claims of social distinctiveness is anything but salutary. The stress on individual liberty and the myth of ethnocultural neutrality that lies at the root of the modern liberal democracy leads to a situation wherein it finds itself unable to speak to the claims of an ideational basis of popular sovereignty whose mechanics are inevitability rooted in the collective. A historically contingent relationship created between the two threads – the idea of nationalism expressed in a historically peculiar

organisational form of the nation-state is not only historically limited but also spatially inconsistent with many contexts, especially those in the Global South.

However, for a limited period of perhaps, a few decades since the end of World War-II until the Oil crisis of the 1970s, the reconciliation of both these threads – that of individual liberty, rule of law and rights with that of equality, effective representation and popular sovereignty – in the guise of a Keynesian liberal nation-state was a possibility. It was during this period that some of the promises of the liberal script were realised. Public policy towards socio-economic equality was a reality in most nation-states (even if record of its realisation was at best, patchy). Most nation-states had ambitious programmes towards this end and on most parameters the record of realisation was good: literacy, health services, education and employment generation. While actual gains made towards socio-economic equality are not something to dismiss as ephemeral, what is of greater salience, discursively, is the entrenchment of the promissory notes embossed on the liberal script. Politics and policy in this era were guided, in good measure, by such promissory notes of equality, popular sovereignty and democracy, which in turn was to lead to individual liberty, rights and rule of law. Such a narrative of the liberal script was internalised by the body politic of many nation-states, especially that in India.
The counter-revolution of such a narrative was never very far away. The constant interrogation of 'successes' of the promissory notes started as early as the 1960s: first in the guise of effectiveness of the implementation model and soon, by the 1970s, in the form of questioning of the model itself. With the veritable collapse of the Keynesian state and the emergence of the neoliberal order, the balance between the political and policy; and, its relationship to the promissory notes of the liberal script was inverted.

The resultant shifts in politics and policy and the prioritisation of rational methodological individualism under the guise of neoliberal policies and models increased the tension between the two threads of the liberal script that undergirded the unsteady balance. Unabashed pursuit of individual rational interest buttressed by individual liberty and a notion of rule of law had far-reaching impacts on liberal politics. Promises of pursuit of equality and popular sovereignty was discarded at the altar of market-led economic efficiency. Promises of liberal script were well on their way to being belied, altering the basis of both, the mechanisms of socio-economic equality as well as the fundamental basis of the political community on which the notion of popular sovereignty was premised. It is not accidental that political assertions claiming recognition as justice for unique social communities grew manifold during this period.

It is such contextualisation of populism in the political economy of the liberal script that lends populism a more concrete meaning while differentiating it from other historical episodes labelled as populism of the Left or the Right. Consequently, it is also crucial to differentiate the contemporary phase of populism from ideological *popular* mobilisations noted in various other temporal and geographical contexts.

Characterizing Populism

With respect to the meaning of the term populism,

> [b]ack in the late 1960s, "populism" appeared in debates about decolonization, speculations concerning the future of "peasantism", and, perhaps most surprising … at the beginning of the twenty-first century, discussions about the origins and likely developments of Communism in general Maoism in particular.[5]

However, the contemporary usage of this term does not necessarily denote a continued intellectual lineage. In fact, its meaning differs across political landscapes. While European usage denotes the rise of illiberalism expressed in xenophobic or narrow nationalist political patterns, democracy theorists are concerned with the rise of neoliberal technocracy, implying the increasing central role of technical experts or elite who may not be in tune with popular expectations – widening the hiatus between inscription of popular sovereignty of the liberal script and the extant political reality.[6] Populism, in this sense, is often construed as a democratic corrective to restore aspirations of popular sovereignty. The rise of various 'Occupy' movements in recent years (for instance, Occupy Wall Street of the US and the Anti-corruption-Lok Pal movement in India) have been described as populist, suggesting an alternative mode of politics. Such "populist' political processes are seen as expressions of citizens' disenchantment with political figures seen to represent the old elite and channelise the widespread resentment of the inversion of democratic aspirations, alluded to earlier. "Populists" claim to reflect popular aspirations of the citizenry and are not limited to any particular ideological position or school.

Claims of populist leaderships and adherents notwithstanding, populist politics, under close scrutiny, may not lend itself to the restoration or prioritisation of the inherent imbalance of the liberal script. The expansion of illiberal technocratic/ elitist democracy that populist forms seek to check or correct may actually entrench illiberalism. The conflation of popular sovereignty with an ersatz version of equality in actual fact, strengthens a hollowed-out version of the other promises of the liberal script: that of individual liberty, substantive equality and, indeed, a robust rule of law. The subordination of the individual to the collective in populist imagination and mobilisation draws from both, the spectacular success of the promissory notes of the liberal script as also from a well-understood weakness of the liberal script. However, both, the weakness of the liberal script as well as its subornation by the populist mode of illiberal democracy are rooted in structural factors.

II

Liberal Script and its Belied Promises

The standard approach in social sciences to ascertain the impact of a political process or a set of policies is to collate and analyse the relevant performance datasets. For instance, to assess the degree to which the promises of full literacy have been realised, literacy datasets or perhaps, GERs, learning achievements, or such like are utilised. However, this approach is a cognitive trap when it comes to examining the liberal script and its promises. Almost all indicators indicate that giant strides have been made towards fulfilling the promises of equality in terms of significant improvements in economic opportunities for the citizenry. Almost all aspects of citizens' life – education, health, economic opportunities, employment, etc – have witnessed public policy geared towards creation of a more equitable society. However, the central argument that the promises of equality and democracy embedded in the liberal promise has left a lot be desired, stands. Indeed, the liberal promise may be seen as a mere declaratory exercise – as a legitimising apparatus – of the liberal state while the record of politics and policy seems to have singularly failed to strive towards such promises.

Belied Hopes of Economic Equality

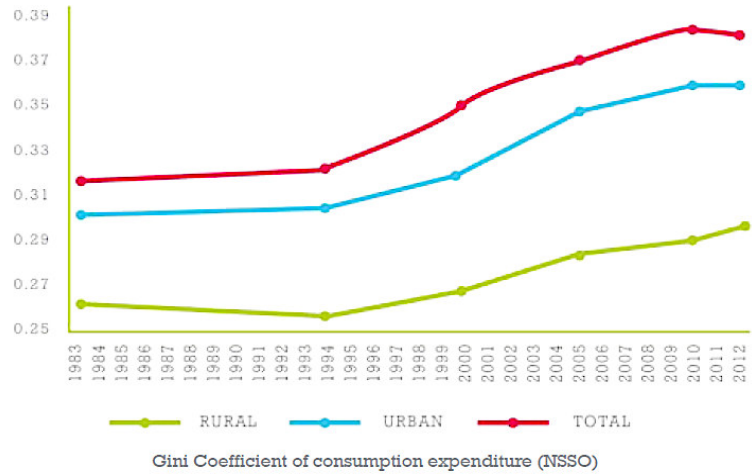
The liberal polity instituted in India at the time of independence was self-consciously geared towards, apart from other things, expansion of "Equality - of status and of opportunity…", as claimed in the Preamble to the Constitution. Indubitably, historic strides were made towards this goal when universal adult franchise was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in the face of dire warnings by many. Such a step was in tune with the then prevailing global consensus in the liberal discourse.
Once the question of democratic equality was seen to be settled after the adoption of universal franchise by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, all that was seen to remain was the question of socio-economic equality, which required focus on economic growth along with redistribution. Once again, it was in consonance with the then prevailing discursive consensus, filtered through the lenses of first, modernisation theory and later, the neoliberal turn to economic policies.[7] The question of inter-group equality was also a concern but the democratic assertion and expansion in the country took a different trajectory, which is addressed in the next section.

Returning to questions of economic equality, there is a large critical literature that underlines that the shift to neoliberal policies has been largely negative for the question of equity.

> … Indian policymakers have always been concerned with the reduction of poverty and inequality. … After independence and for a period of about forty years, India followed a development strategy based on central planning … [owing to] the apprehension that total reliance on the market mechanism would result in excessive consumption by upper-income groups, along with relative under-investment in sectors essential to the development of the economy. …. [T]he macroeconomic sensitivity to inflation as fallout from growth reflected government concerns regarding the redistributive effects of inflation, which typically affected workers, peasants and unorganized sectors more.
>
> From the mid-1980s, the Indian government gradually adopted market-oriented economic reform policies. In the early phase, these were associated with an expansionist fiscal strategy that involved additional fiscal allocations to the rural areas, and thus counterbalanced the redistributive effects of the early liberalization….
>
> [Since the] … early 1990s, when the explicit adoption of neo-liberal reform programs marked the beginning of a period of intensive economic liberalization[,] … focus of economic policies … shifted away from state intervention for more equitable distribution towards liberalization, privatization and globalization. [8]

The impact of such policies has been vast and across almost all aspects of economic life of the country – from employment to health, from education to the farm sector. A detailed assessment of such impact in this paper is contraindicated owing to the vibrant debate already present in the literature and only a few indicative analyses will be cited as examples to undergird the overall argument.

Chart 1: Gini Coefficient for India: 1983-2012



Source: Himanshu, 'Gini of wealth in India in 2017 is at 0.83, which puts India among countries with high inequality' in Counterview.org April 4, 2018, https://counterview.org/2018/04/04/gini-of-wealth-in-india-in-2017-is-at-0-83-which-puts-india-among-countries-with-high-inequality/ accessed on 09 August 2019.

Perhaps, one of the best indicators to underline the rising inequity in the country is a look at the Gini-coefficient (Chart 1). A fairly sharp rise is noticed from 1984 onwards in both urban and rural populations. In fact, detailed analysis by economists has shown that unlike the impression that averages may provide, rural inequality is high – to the tune of 0.595:

> … income inequality for each village, …, indicate extremely high levels of inequality, … The value of the Gini coefficient, … of the distribution of per capita incomes across all villages was 0.595. …
> [Besides,] … the pattern of income distribution in our survey villages shows extreme concentration of incomes in households in the top income decile (and even smaller percentiles) of the population. … Data on household incomes from our village surveys point to certain serious concerns about income inequality in rural areas.[9]

The overall picture of economic inequity is a similarly rising trend in the recent past across various social groups:

> The trends and dimensions of inequality … confirm that India is not only a high inequality country but also that inequalities have seen a rising trend through the last two decades. The rising inequality is … also [visible] in aspects of horizontal inequality which have seen widening of the gap between the marginalised and excluded groups versus the rest[,] … determined not only by the initial endowments but also by the inequalities in access to opportunities … The few who control economic resources can then use it to influence political decisions, impeding democratic processes and social cohesion.[10]

The inability of public policy in addressing such rising inequalities is underlined. Similarly, the acuteness of policy shifts on the agricultural sector is particularly stark. The recent agricultural scenario is characterised by distress, expressed in rising farmer suicides, contract farming (seen as a

form of debt bondage by Dhanagare), declining credit availability, increasing migration to urban areas in search of employment, declining number of farmers and insufficiency of policy support to agriculture.

> Thus, all the characteristics of agrarian crisis in India could be attributed to the policy of neoliberalism that serves the interests of corporate industrial capitalism, … The agrarian crisis remains because the Indian state has neither desire nor ability to resolve it the near future.[11]

Non-agricultural employment barely shows a different picture. Informalisation and casualisation of employment is the rising trend, highlighted by a number of recent studies. In "… this phenomenon of growth of insecure employment in the organized sector, it is evident that among its major determinants, the shifting role of the state in the recent decades is a prominent one. Of late, it is widely acknowledged that there is a discernible decline in the state's role …"[12]

> The quality of employment is also deteriorating in a deepening of labour market restructuring that began in the early 1980s, leading to increased economic insecurity … Labour market restructuring in this era has been accompanied by a continuing decline in unionisation rates … particularly since the 1980s. UNCTAD globally estimates that the share of global economic production going to labour versus capital fell from just over 65% to under 54% between 1980 and 2011.These trends have led to a new … 'precariat', characterised by people working in short term jobs, without recourse to stable occupational identities or careers, reliable social protection support and protective regulations.[13]

In light of this wide-brush analysis of the changes in economic inequality in India, it is perhaps no surprise that promises of equality of opportunity in the social sectors – education and health – have also been belied.

The impact of policy shifts since the liberalisation of the Indian economy on equity in opportunity for education has been more complex but overall negative:

> … India's record in reducing inequality of educational opportunity in post- liberalization is characterized by considerable variation across states and regions. … Kerala stands out as the least unequal in terms of educational opportunities … In general, Southern states experienced lower inequality in educational opportunity when compared to Northern states … The incidence of rural poverty is high in … Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal. Yet both West Bengal and Orissa made significant progress in reducing inequality of opportunity whilst the situation worsened in Bihar. …. [A]lthough not causal, significant positive associations were found between policy variables, poverty reduction, GDP growth elasticity of poverty, growth rates and reduction in inequality of educational opportunities. [However,] … attention needs to be given to circumstance factors such as childhood poverty that affect schooling directly and are common across some social groups

Thus, equity in opportunities for education is correlated to the decline on economic inequity, which has been shown above to have been a negative trend.

Similarly, declining quality of employment also has a negative impact on equality of access to health:

> Health sector reforms were introduced into a largely underfunded, weak public sector that co-existed with an aggressively growing private sector. The public sector was reconfigured with the introduction of market principles [leading to] introduction of user fees, public–private partnerships and greater decentralisation of the health service system [and,] commercialisation of health services. …. This

> change in mindset has serious consequences for the availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability and quality of health services. Over the last two decades, the negative fallout of commercialisation … has been the widening of inequalities in access. The burden of paying for care has affected the lower middle and working classes adversely. Rising out-of-pocket and catastrophic expenditures on medical care in India is an example of inequities in access. High out-of-pocket expenditure in health results in a significant proportion of the population foregoing medical treatment … due to the inability to pay.[14]

While a lot of social sciences analysis around all these issues will assert drastic strides made towards an expansion of economic opportunities over the past 7-8 decades, including the spurt of economic growth over the past 2 decades or so, the issue at hand is not to prove such claims as incorrect. Indeed, many of such claims are correct and perhaps, human consumption and corollary economic goods have never witnessed such high availability. However, as has been underlined above, parallelly, the degree of inequity has also perhaps, never been so high.

Liberal Theory and Diversity: Wither Equality?

The hiatus between universal individual rights offered by liberal theory and practice as the fundamental basis of political organisation; and, group claims of recognition of difference by diversely organised social groups is a part of the constitutive impulse of the liberal state. The uneasy relationship of the political processes premised on individual rights to a variety of group claims of recognition – premised on a wide variety of social identifiers – can also not be dismissed. The collective impact of such tension has been threefold: (a) legitimate claims of social difference have been either conflated into an economistic reading or ignored; (b) belied the promises of equality embedded in the liberal script; and, (c) laid the foundation for carving out of political spaces for populist political mobilisations. While

> [m]any liberals hoped that the new emphasis on 'human rights' would resolve minority conflicts [since] … cultural minorities will be protected indirectly, by guaranteeing basic civil and political rights to all individuals regardless of group membership …. The leading assumption has been that members of national monitories do not need, are not entitled to, or cannot be granted rights of a special character. The doctrine of human rights has been put forward as a substitute for the concept of minority rights, with the strong implication that minorities whose members enjoy individual equality of treatment cannot legitimately demand facilities for the maintenance of their ethnic particularism. Guided by this philosophy, the United Nations deleted all references to the rights of … minorities in its Universal declaration of Human Rights… This shift … was embraced by many liberals…[15]

In pursuit of the premise and promises of democracy and equality, social theory has been keenly focussed on the idea of social justice at least since 1940s. Scholars have devoted themselves to developing models, mechanisms, processes and institutions to ensure expansion of opportunities for equality and social justice with a special attention to those socially or economically marginalised by closely attention to the redistributional impact of the Keynesian welfare state (which, as argued above, is a promise belied).

Consequent split of social justice and equality between economic equality (which was the main focus of social theory) and socio-cultural equality (which was at best an afterthought in much of social theory) led to a substantial portion of the promise of liberal theory to be belied. The promissory notes of liberalism – that of equality and democratic participation on the basis of

substantive equality – were undermined by such a split. This encouraged alternative (perhaps, original) forms of political solidarities for mobilisation to seek social justice and equality:

> The discourse of social justice, once centered on distribution, is now increasingly divided between claims for redistribution, on the one hand, and claims for recognition, on the other. Increasingly, too, recognition claims tend to predominate. … [Recent] developments have conspired to decenter, if not to extinguish, claims for egalitarian redistribution. [Consequently, the] … two kinds of justice claims are often dissociated from one another - both practically and intellectually [, leading to] … activist tendencies that look to redistribution as the remedy…[16]

Political solidarities seeking 'recognition' of difference have thus emerged as the central organising principle of contemporary politics, with scholarly focus on its meaning and relationship with the idea of redistribution and implications for politics.[17] This split, Nancy Fraser however argues are " ... are false antitheses … [J]ustice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition. Neither alone is sufficient. [T]the emancipatory aspects of the two problematics" require a "comprehensive framework" by devising "a two dimensional conception of justice that can accommodate both defensible claims for social equality and defensible claims for the recognition of difference"[18].
Further,

> … no claims for justice can avoid presupposing some notion of representation, … Thus, representation is always inherent in all claims for redistribution and recognition. … [N]o redistribution or recognition without representation.[19]

The political and theoretical eclipse of this aspect of social justice (pursuit of equality) inherent in the promises of the liberal script, along with conflation of redistributive and recognitive accepts, that creates a irresolvable burden on liberal theory: that of representation of difference,

> [b]ecause what is at stake here is the process by which … injustice … [is created by] meta-political misrepresentation… [which] arises when states and transnational elites monopolize the activity of frame-setting, denying voice to those who may be harmed in the process, and blocking creation of democratic arenas where the latter's claims can be vetted and redressed. …. [This in turn] excludes[s] the overwhelming majority of people from participation …. [, a] chance to engage on terms of parity in decision-making about the 'who'.[20]

The inability of liberal theory to device adequate mechanisms to address this hiatus can be witnessed in the political systems across the world. The demands for recognition of difference has barely produced social theory to address the three dimensions of injustice without reducing one into the other. Claims of representation and recognition of difference have been increasingly identified as 'ethnic' or 'ethno-religious'. E.g. Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, Muslims and Christians in Lebanon and the Philippines, Whites and Blacks in South Africa, Tamils and Sinhalas in Sri Lanka and multiple demands in eastern Europe and central Asia. The bases of seeking such recognition and representation may depend on a diverse number of factors – cultural, linguistic and regional contiguity, religious, caste or historical similarity. Nonetheless, there seems to be almost no serious contestation of the political space (with the state as well as with other similarly politically-articulate groups) that is not rooted in (and often articulated through) the lens of politics of difference.[21] For instance, the range of claims for recognition of difference and adequate representation in India is wide: linguistic movements in the many parts of India during the late 1950s-1970s; the numerous ethnic identities in the North-eastern parts of the country; the Dalit

assertion of North India; various 'development-deficit'-oriented articulations across the country (such as Telangana, Ladakh, erstwhile UP hills or Uttaranchal, north West Bengal, tribal south Gujarat and erstwhile tribal MP or Chhattisgarh, etc.); the Coorg issue in Karnataka, communal mobilisation of 1980s and 1990s; and so on. With the exception of the communal identity politics and Dalit assertion, all other articulations of identity demand various degrees and forms of autonomy as a solution to demands for representation.

In light of the density and variety of claims for recognition and representation, at least four distinctive forms may be identified as merely a heuristic device. The following broad categories for the limited purpose of analytical discipline are as follows:[22]

(a) Politics of Socio-cultural ('Tribal') Recognition

Arguably, the strongest linkage that can be established between politics of recognition and identity, and that of redistribution/ development, lies in the realm of various tribal/ *adivasi* communities in India. There is a wide variety of articulation of tribal identity in India; ranging from those in the North-eastern States to those in Central India (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh & Orissa) to those in Gujarat and Maharashtra, as also to those in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka). The wide difference between the dynamics of identity articulation between these tribal social groups notwithstanding, their contest for resources with the State take similar forms. Much of this contest structured around politics of recognition is mediated through the syntax (and sometimes, the frame of) politics of redistribution; the latter also forming the basis of a language of dialogic engagement with the State. The question of co-equal representation remains a central, unresolved issue of liberal theory.

(b) Politics of Recognition of a Region

The politics of recognition and representation of a regional identity also takes varied forms across the country. Sometimes, mediated by tribal, socio-communal or other forms of politics of recognition, such claims are often seen as a 'more secular' by the state. Much of regional identity politics (e.g., that of Uttaranchal, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh and lately, Gujarat and Bihar) takes a strong language of politics of development and is focussed on leveraging public resources controlled or structured by the state. Such representation of 'backwardness' also overlaps with the belied promises of economic equity.

(c) Politics of Recognition by Exclusion

These identities, premised often on socio-religious factors, seen as the greatest threat of the 'nation-building' process but have paradoxically, been central in structuring the national political process. Such claims create a *dispositif* of a social community (e.g. Hindutva), to anchor a politics of exclusion for other social groups. Interestingly, bases of such identities in terms of the developmental-deficits for rest of the social space. The contest between the politics of identity and politics of development continues and is seen to be throwing up an 'alternative' form of imagination of a homogenous community as a discursive troupe that is often mobilised by the populist political process.

(d) Politics of Recognition by Representation and Inclusion

This strand requires the mediation of politics of development for a dialogic engagement with the state as witnessed in the recent articulation of Dalit politics in many north Indian states, chiefly, in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Rajasthan. The articulation of a Dalit caste identity creates a new form of challenge to the premise of liberal democracy, especially, its stress on equity and justice. The community-based imagination of the identity deployed by this strand of articulation serves both

purposes of acting as a counterpoint to (c) above as well as creating an alternative imagination of political process of recognition and representation.

In all the above claims demanding recognition of difference and fairer terms of representation, the record of the Indian state has at best been patchy. Consequently, the Indian state has repeatedly translated such claims of representation on the basis of participatory parity into issues of mere economic equality.[23] And, lately, the state's ability to address even matters of economic equality has also been rather dismal.

The impact of this process is deeper than it would appear at first glance. By allowing almost all such claims to fester unaddressed and unresolved for decades, the liberal script has created the basis for its own subversion. The longer the liberal state ignored or undermined claims of recognition and representation, the more was the necessity of such identity claims to engender autonomous forms of imagination of a homogenous community striving for recognition. The fracture of community from the imagination and promissory notes of liberalism lies in such belied promises of liberalism.

It is merely a small step, politically, for autonomous and alternative forms of imagination of a homogenous community (premised on societal factors) to aspire for such recognition from a larger (arguably) non-liberal forms of political process: that of populist politics. It is not accidental that the syntax of populist politics and that of recognition have large areas of overlap.

Further, if Indian nationhood has been melded from fragments of more regional socio-cultural imaginations of a national community,[24] such fragmentary imagination of homogenous political communities (expressed as claims of recognition and representation) also lies in the root of the populist imaginations. For instance, large sections of the country with a history of politics of recognition are the most animated ones in the service of populist politics.

The political process that no longer engages with the promises of the liberal script – that of equality and freedom but this does not mean that the popular aspirations for the promises of the liberal script has been surrendered. On the contrary, the democratic form that the same liberal theory instituted seems to have survived but the pursuit of liberal equality now takes the form of a populist politics.

The result is a paradox of an illiberal democracy in pursuit of the promises of liberal theory.

III

In Lieu of Conclusion: Belied Liberal Promises to Illiberal Democracy

The foregoing discussion lends us numerous threads of deeper analysis of the relationship between the liberal promissory notes of liberty, equality and social justice on the one hand, and, the contemporary rise of populism and an illiberal democracy in India and wider world, on the other.

Foremost, it is important to underline that the popular support for populist forms of politics is not a rejection of the liberal promises. On the contrary, populist politics in India is rooted in the belied promises of liberalism. In actual fact, the populist political articulation is unable to ignore the basic premises of liberalism – political, socioeconomic, and, so some extent, sociocultural equality in the processual and institutional forms of democracy, even if substantive formulation of such promises are conflated into a minimalistic and non-substantive trope by populist politics.

The fundamental formulation of the populist political trope in the country recognises the high premium that citizens place on equality of all citizens. The populist argument is therefore

couched in the lingual tropes equality of all citizens, even if no such substantive notion is embedded therein.

A similar argument of equality of all citizens is also embedded in the populist political formations' stress on homogenising social diversity into an undifferentiated body political. Given the poor record of the liberal script in reconciling social diversity and social justice with conceptual, institutional and processual forms of liberal democracy, the promise of equality by the populist formations appeals to social diversities that have struggled with for decades. While the liberal script reduced claims of difference to question of economic equality, the populist forms interpret such claims as struggles for bland equality, devoid of social distinctiveness.

The neoliberal turn in liberal democracies highlights the degree to which promissory notes of liberal democracy have been rendered empty. The denial of substantive equality under the neoliberal regimes for more than three decades now only serves the purpose of encouraging the pursuit of alternative avenues for pursuit of the same promises. Populism, with its simplistic promises of equality of all is thus, filling the gap that the liberal political script and formations have abdicated.

It also needs to be underlined that populism utilises the same institutional forms that the liberal script had created and deepened – in India and across the world: that of mass democracy. In the absence of such deeply embedded and widely accepted institutional architecture of electoral politics, it would have been far more difficult for populist formations to be able to build their political articulations while seemingly addressing the belied promises of liberalism.

Last, there can be little question about India being an acutely contested democracy, which is one of the major institutional successes of the liberal script. However, the capture of the promises of liberalism by populist forms leeches away the substantive contents of such democracy. The result is that the country may still be a democracy but increasingly an illiberal one.

Notes

[1] Bethan McKernan. 'From Reformer to 'New Sultan': Erdoğan's Populist Evolution' in *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/from-reformer-to-new-sultan-erdogans-populist-evolution, accessed on 01 August 2019.

[2] See Emil Husted. 'From Creation to Amplification: Occupy Wall Street's Transition into an Online Populist Movement' in Julie Uldam and Anne Vestergaard (eds.) *Civic Engagement and Social Media: Political Participation Beyond Protest*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2015, pp. 153-173; and, Joe Lowndes and Dorian Warren, 'Occupy Wall Street: A Twenty-First Century Populist Movement?' in *Dissent*, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/occupy-wall-street-a-twenty-first-century-populist-movement, accessed on 04 August 2019. Also see

[3] See Jan-Werner Mu¨ller, *What Is Populism?*, Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, chapter 1.

[4] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso, 2000, pp. 2-3.

[5] Jan Werner Müller, *What is Populism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, p. ?.

[6] Ibid.

[7] The complex process of discursive consensus about the tools of economic equality, its critiques and shift to the neoliberal consensus is beyond the space and scope of this paper. Suffice it to note that the promissory notes of the new liberal order did contain a large measure of such policies.

[8] Parthapratim Pal and Jayati Ghosh, *Inequality in India: A survey of recent trends,* DESA Working Paper No. 45 ST/ESA/2007/DWP/45, New York: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007, p. 1,

[9] Madhura Swaminathan and Vikas Rawal, 'Is India Really a Country of Low Income-Inequality?: Observations from Eight Villages' in *Review of Agrarian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, pp. 19-21, available at

http://ras.org.in/is_india_really_a_country_of_low_income_inequality _observations _from _eight _ villages, accessed on 09 August 2019.

[10] M. Niaz Asadullah Gaston Yalonetzky, *Inequality of Educational Opportunity in India: Changes over Time and across States*, Discussion Paper No. 5146, Bonn: Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit Institute for the Study of Labor, 2010, pp. 25-26, available at http://ftp.iza.org/dp5146.pdf, accessed on 10 August 2019.

[11] D. N. Dhanagare, 'Declining credibility of the neoliberal state and agrarian crisis in India: some observations; in B. B. Mohanty, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Agrarian Transition: India in the global debate*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016, p. 161.

[12] Babu P. Remesh, 'Informal Work in the Formal Sector: Conceptualizing the Changing Role of the State in India' in Ernesto Noronha & Premilla D'Cruz, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Work and Employment in Globalizing India*, Singapore: Springer, p. 84.

Populism and Deployment of Social Justice: Caste as a Coordinate in the Politics Bihar and U.P

Manish K. Jha *

Populism is generally defined as 'ordinary people's opposition to elites'. It is assumed that populism in a democracy is intended to give ordinary people a chance to counter elites through representative politics. However, populism has a complicated relationship with democracy and could also be ambiguous because of certain political propositions. The premise that populism thrives by attacking 'the elite' and defending the interests of 'the ordinary people' needs closer and more in-depth scrutiny. The trajectory of the Indian political system and functioning of electoral politics informs us that populism has been a political practice for several decades. At the national scene, populist politics took various shapes in the last 50 years -from the regimes led by Indira Gandhi to Narendra Modi. Besides, the regional leaders from Jayalalithaa, Lalu Prasad to Mamta Banerjee, etc. have also exhibited the astute and distinctive nature of populism in their areas of influence. However, the locus of the agenda and its bent varied from one to another. Vreese et al. (2018) emphasize that populism might increase representation and give a voice to groups of citizens that do not feel heard by the current political elite. It might expand the attention for issues that are not in the mainstream discourse. The authors further articulate that populism might improve the responsiveness of the political system by making actors and parties align their policies more with the "wishes of the people".The way populism evolved and influenced the polity in different parts of the globe, it needs to be examined, on the one hand, with an element of threat and risk to minority rights, curbs on civil discourse, etc. and, on the other, with a scope and hope for expanding democratic reach to hitherto left out. The politics around caste and social justice offer to comprehend the practice of expansion of the democratic scope for the people, mainly on the margins. The discourse on populism is rooted in the idea of popular will and is comfortable aligning itself to any ideology that could be broadly appealing to a majority. However, the constitution of this majority is not static, it is dynamic, and it keeps changing.

A plethora of ideas have been put forward to explain the rise and success of populism; however, the explanation varies from country to county and from one political context to another. In the present paper, I am examining populism as political practice; the practice that invokes the idea of social justice through various instrumentalities, including caste. The ideal of the Indian constitution and demands of liberal democracy in post-colonial Indian politics witnessed the evolution of populism in dynamic and diverse forms. The subtleties could be observed, ascertained and assessed in different states in very many ways. The ideological underpinning of populism engages with its

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idioms and phrases, rhetoric, institutional formations, mobilizing techniques, impact etc.
In this paper, I am looking at populism at play in the Hindi heartland in general and in the state of Bihar and U.P. in particular. The Bihar case mostly traverses in the past, whereas U.P. illustrates contemporary populist politics. Apart from what do we mean by populism and how do we construe the practice of politics in the realm of populism, the paper primarily engages with the idea of '*samajik nyaya'* (social justice) that dominated the tapestry of populism in the states under discussion. What has been the articulation and manifestation of social justice and where does caste enter in this practice of politics? Conceptually and strategically, this politics is non-elitist and attempts to bring together masses. Is it that in the process of caste arithmetic, the practice of inclusion and exclusion complicates the process? If one takes the Ambedkarite idea of dealing with the caste question and therefore responding to justice in classical terms, it would have meant annihilation of caste. But did the social justice articulation in the Hindi heartland at any point in time attempt that? The answer is an emphatic 'no'. Instead, it reconfigured the caste groupings for mobilization and electoral assertion and thereby turning the*caste social* into *caste political.* Has this been a careful and conscious decision and informed by the pragmatism that populism seems to value? The language, tone, tenor, idiom, phrases and slogans used since the time of articulation for social justice in general and identity politics in particular by leading socialist leaders in the late 1960s offer a solid foundation to cognize populist politics. The route that practice of populism took in the Hindi heartland navigated through tumultuous phases. How are we to appreciate this practice of politics through the management of caste? How are we to comprehend the ideas, strategies and outcome of such populism? To grasp the inception and trajectory of the contours of populism, it is prudent to restrict one's engagement within a specific timeframe. Yet, the present paper would take a risk to traverse from the past to the contemporary so as to understand the politics and shifts in a nuanced manner; particularly in the state of Bihar and U.P.

The political history of Hindi heartland is replete with innumerable instances of caste alliances, networks and mobilisations. In the past, the political regimes tried to manage and administer caste in a manner whereby the ruling elite can gain legitimacy of its rule and enjoy the support of majority sections of the society. The majority, in this case, was founded on the core support base of upper caste, Dalits and minority. Challenging this elitist management strategy of Congress, in the middle of the 1960s, the socialist group invoked the possibility for politics by masses and thus brought populism of a particular kind in the political frame. Caste was brought to use for claiming a share in socio-political and economic resources, particularly by the underprivileged and the marginalized. The questions thus come to the fore: should populism in such context be assumed to function according to the logic of resentment, with a sense of envy or injustice? Does populism offer assurances for redemption through the jurisdiction of governmental action? While engaging with these one realizes that the consolidation of the social processes and the struggle for hegemony of the backward and Dalit castes of Bihar, which have become sufficiently organised since the mid-1960s, had limited electoral success. The socialist ideology forcefully articulated by Lohia and others portrayed the Indian National Congress as'elitist' and made anti-Congressism a creed. The caste coalition with OBCs and some sections of the Dalits gave rise to the first non-Congress formation that comprised the Socialists, the Bhartiya Jan Sangh and splinter groups of Congress. How was this 'coalition of extremes' taken forward, and how was the idea of social justice played out in the decades to come? The inability of the erstwhile socialist party to carry on populist politics beyond the reservation and the subsequent decline of Congress party has witnessed right-wing populism making inroads in many fields and arena of politics. The political development of the contemporary decade demands closer scrutiny of right-wing populism. How does the right-wing populism make use of

caste *politic*s, along with its core agenda that has religious and majoritarian bent, and therefore builds a broader electoral base? The journey from a socialist influenced populism to the invocation of caste and social justice by right-wing populism (though portraying itself as caste neutral) provides fascinating details to understand the transformation of the realpolitik in the contemporary.

Through the portrayal of the political interplay in the Hindi heartland, the paper examines whether populism is first and foremost a set of ideas as has been articulated through an 'Ideational approach'. Contemporary populism in Western Europe is defined as 'an ideology, which pits a virtuous and homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous "others" who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice' (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008: 3). Are the masses in our context homogenous and their issues, concerns and expectation in sync with each other? How has the differentiation been played out? What has been the nature of inclusion and exclusion characterized by populism in the Hindi heartland? Drawing from Filc's (2010: 128-38) work on the political right in Israel, I shall engage with the material, political and symbolic dimensions of exclusion and inclusion in populist politics at different phases. Material dimension refers to the distribution of state resources to specific groups; specifically targets certain groups to increase their participation and representation, and the symbolic dimension sets the boundary of the people into the 'we' or 'us' instead of the 'them' and 'they' (Mudde and Kalwasser 2013).

Besides, these dimensions, one realizes that at the very core of populism is the idea of a people and their apparent unmediated relationship with a leader. Kurt Weyland (2001: 14) argues that populism 'is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalist leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers'. How do we understand nature, persona and strategies of such leaders and how such regimes deploy the category of people? Does the process of mediation between the leader and people disappear or it takes newer forms and processes? The politics that followed since 1990 is mostly the politics of reassertion and reaffirmation of caste cleavages, deepened further to capture political power: turning caste from its dominant social domain to make it caste political. The field of politics informs us how leaders often utilize resentment as a logic of social and political action in populist politics. The contour of populism that identifies "the will of the people with justice and morality" (Shils 1956: 98) is occupying the contemporary approach of populism, where both justice and morality are interpreted and deployed strategically. The paper shall probe about the practice of this strategy by select populist leaders, more specifically Karpoori Thakur and Lalu Prasad in Bihar and Narendra Modi at a wider arena. Even with vast ideological and political differences, all the three leaders came up from a humble background. They presented themselves as belonging to masses as against the elite of the society. I will also explore more about 'the people' in populist politics. If the poor or the underprivileged are said to be "the people", populism hitches on to the left, and income redistribution and welfare-oriented policies follow. Contrariwise, if a religious, ethnic or racial majority constitutes "the people", we get populism that aligns with the right. Can this be interpreted so neatly, or do we need to examine this minutely and analytically?

This takes us to another crucial aspect of populism, i.e. the role of political communication. Populist ideas must be communicated discursively to realize the anticipated purposes. What are the tone, tenor and content of language employed in the process? We are engaging with the textual and visual sources, namely speeches, slogans, manifestos, policies, demeanour and other aspects of the performativity of the leader to grasp the promise for a better future. We are also examining how leaders use the politics of grievance and 'politics of faith' (Canovan 1999) and exploit the gap between promise and performance. The paper thus interrogates the scope of social justice and the

location of caste in the political field. While appreciating that populism hinges upon charismatic leaders having direct, unmediated access to the masses, we are investigating how the leadership trait and communication strategies in different variants of populism are often intense and puzzling. However, the approach is to keep oneself cautious about making a normative judgment about populism. At a broader constituency that has mass appeal in the contemporary Hindi heartland, a case in point will be the figure of Narendra Modi. As a leader, he has often sidelined the party organization, appealed directly to the Indian public through sophisticated use of communication and technology and nurtured a state of enduring political mobilization that seeks to bypass intermediaries. And at the state-specific context from the past, our case in point will be the figure of Karpoori Thakur and Lalu Prasad Yadav who demonstrated a vernacular style to extraordinary connection with people that bypassed intermediaries. Referring to Ostiguy, Jaffrelot (2017) highlights that populism shares the deployment of a "plebeian grammar" by a leader who projects themselves simultaneously as one of the people and as their protector. They project themselves against an alien, immoral, or exploitative "other" although their identification of both the people and their other differs considerably across the variants of populism.

The paper explains that populism is not only a political practice, but it is also a social and discursive phenomenon. We are describing how leaders manage to claim to speak in the name of the people, and their politics reveals the performative reference of 'the people' that appeals to social mobilization. How populist leaders manage to scapegoat minority and 'illegal' migrants and appeal for vengeance against 'elites'? How micro-management of caste that crafts a new social equation is made to project beyond caste/class/identity and is identified as an aspirational group? The latest turn in populist politics has redefined the politics of caste coalition and the meaning of social justice, and the paper engages with this change. How people in the Hindi belt comprehend the persona of an individual leader as embodiment of the nation and questioning that persona is deemed illegitimate? And the appeal of such persona allows reconfiguration of caste and social justice politics in a manner where it is believed to have flattened identity politics? Do we really identify with a saturation of power of caste, or the idea of *samajik nyaya* is emerging in a new *avatar* under contemporary populist politics? Besides, populist leaders also exhibit limits of convention and civility as a burden of bourgeois liberalism; and they indicate the prospect of making politics of unreal, real. The paper thus traverses from past to present to make sense of the dynamics of populist politics in the two states.

Question of caste and the Socialist variant of Populist Politics

The political discourse of social justice has been instrumental in keeping caste at the centre stage of polity in a state like Bihar. The manifestation of social justice is often related to redistributive claims, i.e. just distribution of resources and goods as also 'politics of recognition'. The politics of recognition and capacity of caste to impact democratic polity can be ascertained through various instances of caste alliances and networks. Within two decades of India's independence, socialist leaders started emphasizing about the imminent reality of the consolidation of power in the hands of post-colonial 'elite' that led to the exhaustion of democratic aspiration of 'people'. Socialist political leaders like Karpoori Thakur started making concerted attempts towards building a coalition among the backward caste groups for political recognition and assertion. Making the upper caste/class as the 'other' in the alternate political discourse channelized the power of the hitherto excluded and marginalised castes and communities in Bihar. Slogans like *"Sansopa ne baandhi gaanth, pichde pawen sau me saath"* (Samyukta Socialist Party is determined to secure 60 per cent reservations for the backwards) and "*Sau se kam na hazaar se jyada, samajwaad ka yahi takaja"* (Neither less than hundred

nor more than thousand, this is the socialist ideology) captured the imagination of backward and downtrodden by conscious realization of the 'other' and the 'elite'. The retributive imagination even went further when noted socialist leader Jagdeo Prasad gave a provocative slogan '*agle saal bhado main, gore haath kado main*(In the next sowing season, upper-caste will have to soil their hands). The slogans on the streets and political discourse within legislative debates, in a way, gave shape to a rather indigenous populist politics in Bihar in early decades after independence.

However, the translation of the populist appeal into politics of governance turned out to be a litmus test for the socialist leaders. At a time when social classes were still struggling to form alliances, identify friends and enemies in politics, formations of government became more of a tactical rather than a strategic exercise. Kumar asserts that in this situation, Karpoori Thakur drove a wedge of populism into the government (Kumar 2017: 16). Through the Karpoori formula of backward caste reservation, Thakur had put caste and reservation as a procedure of government that is marked as a crucial moment in the making of populist government under Karpoori Thakur. The policy to reserve seats in government jobs and educational institutions for members of the backward castes was in sync with populist socialist agenda of social justice. The layered reservation policy of his government symbolised a significant success for backward classes. Lohia's articulation about the relationship between the socialist political tradition and lower caste movements, recognizing "the political potential of the horizontal mobilization of lower castes on issues of social justice and ritual discrimination" finally got actualized (Jha 2019). Along with the reservation policy and subsequent panchayat election outcome that saw a substantive increase in backward caste representation, Thakur affirmed that the Backwards had displaced the Forwards as the dominant force in Bihar politics; that the old days of dominance in public affairs from village to Vidhan Sabha by the 'twice-born' were gone forever...The Forwards interpreted things this way as well, fearing that their days of dominance might indeed have departed, and responded with a volatile mixture of fear and rage (Blair 1980).

The politics of language was yet another populist agenda in the 1960s/1970s that was diligently followed through government action. Thakur underlined English as a language of the 'elite' and powerful. On assuming the ministerial position, he stated that "the ordinary people of Bihar faced enormous trouble due to the usage in English in official work...The gulf between government and people that are preserved by English is not letting people experience that they live in a democratic society" (Aryavarta 2970). Populist governmental assertion *"angrezi main ab kaam na hoga, phir se desh ghulam na hoga"* (we will not allow usage of English, we will not let the country be colonized again) and *"rashtrapati ka beta ya chaprasi ki santaan; bhangi ya bhabhan ho, sabki shiksha ek samaan"* (President's child or peon's child, sweeper or Brahmin, everyone will have common education) acquired popular fancy (Jha 2019).

Moreover, Kumar (2017) asserts that the Karpoori formula and Karpoori division[1] was an attempt to create political subjects of a populist government that props that government. Situating himself within the governmental framework, Karpoori employed governmental rationality to advance the position of the subaltern population. In his approach to governing as also in opposing, emphasis upon population calculation, political arithmetic and rationality in the name of care and welfare of excluded population were always discernible (Jha 2019). The practice of populism that caught the fancy of subaltern masses could produce a solid foundation for future practices of governmentality by the next generation of leaders who assumed centre stage in the 1990s.

From populist politics and governance laced with ideals of social justice by Karpoori Thakur

to the more substantive backward-caste politics of Lalu Prasad Yadav, in more recent periods, caste management has often been referred as a vernacular and regional form of populist politics. The supremacy of dominant upper caste that largely controlled politics and governance of Bihar (except two short breaks in 1969-71 and 1977-79) was exemplified as the 'elite' control over people that needed to be reversed. The ascendance of backward caste leaders challenged 'caste social' that signified various practices that ritualised the low status of certain castes, institutionalised humiliation and contempt, such as the practice of untouchability, and tied them tightly to economic bondage to make escape difficult, if not impossible (Jha and Pushpendra 2015). What changed during the 1990s was the transformation of the caste *social* into the caste *political*. The previous section has already explained that specific political groupings started realizing the limits of democracy under the influence of dominant caste groups and within two decades of India's independence, the backward castes started exhibiting their potential to control the government. However, it took another two decades before Bihar saw them stabilizing their power with assertion and confidence. Socialist leaders, mostly from the backward caste background, assiduously countered the congress and its 'elite' politics. They kept emphasizing the needs and demands to bring 'people' at the focus of politics and governance. Caste was made to appear in a new avatar, 'caste political', which has increasingly been used as an instrument of political assertion. The populist appeal and imagination nurtured the aspiration for the subaltern 'people' to occupy political space away from the power of the 'elite'.

The defeat of the Congress in 1990 marked the end of an era in Bihar's politics that can be best described as "feudal democracy" (Witsoe 2011). Hence, a new political groupings descended with the populist appeal of social justice that resonated well for considerable support and electoral gains. The articulation of populist politics can be understood by the manner through which procedures, rules, tactics, symbols, slogans and, language were re-written by governance structure. The procedural aspect of democratic functioning that suited well to the earlier 'influential' regime was challenged; unsophisticated content was to be introduced in the nature and character of the government. Previous rules and elaborate bureaucratic procedures were construed to be of advantageous to the ruling elite to govern; these elite were supposed to consist of learned men and women, using sophisticated language, maintaining decency and dignity, attired in particular ways. New populist politics despised these.

Lalu Prasad, who symbolized the leader of the masses, positioned himself against the elite and dominant leaders of the earlier regime and assiduously undermined the rational, procedural and elite administrative apparatus. He was assertive about his de-elitisation agenda that had engulfed the administrative machinery till 1990; power and authority of upper-caste dominated bureaucracy were systematically undermined. Laws, rules and procedures had to be bent, stretched, overlooked or even defied (Jha and Pushpendra 2015). This was thus a fascinating case of populist politics and governance by dismantling or partially immobilizing, the government. Lalu's politics had no scope for imitating elitist governance style; he ensured that backward caste should challenge dominant/elite sensibilities and celebrate their humble/rustic social background. The populist Lalu Prasad overlooked the 'illegal' occupation of land by the urban poor for their small tenement and livelihoods; it gave the urban poor (primarily comprising of backward and Dalit castes) a foothold to live and survive.

The dilemma that a government, riding on the slogan of social justice and dignity, would face is, to put it in Partha Chatterjee's words, "How can the particular claims of marginalised population groups, often grounded in violations of law, be made consistent with the pursuit of equal citizenship and civic virtue?" (Chatterjee 2004:64). The claims to governmental care by the hitherto

backward groups like the Yadavs, often embedded in violence and criminality, received an empathetic response from Lalu Prasad's regime, heralding a new governmental approach to the subaltern subject, to the utter dislike of the liberal 'elites' (Jha and Puspendra 2015). While the middle class, the upper castes and the 'sensible' intelligentsia of the country mourned the death of liberal democracy and the rise of the illiberal, the masses of Yadavs and other OBCs would vehemently react as their experience of four decades of living with liberal and constitutional democracy did not promise freedom and dignity.

Conscious of the populist potential of caste-based political practice, the tone and tenor of slogans, political speeches, and administrative acts of Lalu Prasad was crafted to undermine the hegemony of the erstwhile ruling elite of the state. The 'people' and the group speaking in the local dialects, lacking human capital or physical assets, and separated by a considerable social distance from the landed, well-off sections of the society, found a credible notion in the assertion that social justice was more important than the rhetoric of development. The political craft of Lalu was styled on putting the concerns of honour, dignity, and voice much above the 'empty' concerns of development, and this craft was practised aggressively and unambiguously. These practices transformed to a certain extent, the structure of dominance and subordination through an expansion of popular politics and representative democracy, which Witsoe refers to as 'territorial democracy' (Witsoe 2009:65).

Being able to participate in the electoral process was like 'sacred expressions of citizenship' by subaltern masses. It provided opportunities to the backward castes to express their support or opposition through votes and was indeed an empowering feel even when there were no tangible benefits in sight. The process of claim-making could electrify the backward castes and SCs, and Lalu Prasad appropriately utilised their resentment against the upper castes for political gains. Immediately after coming to power and forming government in 1990, Lalu Prasad increased the quota for OBCs from 20 per cent to 27 per cent; the law in this regard came in to force in 1992. He increased quotas for EBCs (Annexure I caste as per Mungeri Lal Commission report) in government jobs from 10 per cent to 14 per cent. After the bifurcation of Bihar (creating a separate state, Jharkhand), it was further increased to 18 per cent. He provided political space and position to several leaders belonging to EBCs. Most of the vice-chancellors and directors of educational institutions were chosen from OBCs. These decisions had a lasting impact in transforming the nature and character of educational institutions, till then monopolised by the upper-caste elites. The government passed a piece of legislation making violation of rules regarding caste-based employment quotas a punishable offence (Witsoe 2006: 15). Besides, the abolition of tax and cess on tapping and selling toddy (a source of livelihood for the Pasi caste), opening of the*charwaha* school (for children engaged in herding) and nominating leaders from extremely backward castes and Dalits for the legislative council and Rajya Sabha was a conscious message of including the excluded.

Caste dominance through the gains of backward-caste politics in Bihar has revealed the emancipatory potential of hitherto backward sections of society. Innovation in the art of political strategies that brought a shift in the caste and class profile of legislative and administrative elites along with changes in the government policies and programmes facilitated the process of giving voice to the silent population. Through the adept application of the logic of popular sovereignty, the discourse of politics was altered. The espousal of Lalu Prasad's politics was practised by relating to people squarely by way of the agenda of justice, dignity, and distribution of governmental resources. The carefully crafted statements, political slogans, symbolic gestures, etc. were all directed to have unswerving connect with 'subaltern people' and undermine the power and authority of the 'other', the 'elite' and the dominant.

Right-Wing Populism and Reconfiguration of the Caste Question

While examining populism in contemporary Europe and Latin America, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) observe that on the one hand populist actors define who belongs to 'the people' vis-à-vis 'the elite', and on the other hand, it informs the ideological features attached to the particular populist ideology of the actors. Our interrogation of populist politics in Hindi heartland, from post-Mandal (the 1990s) to contemporary ascendance of right-wing populism, apprises the process of caste/community and its alliances that presents 'people' vs elite politics in a new *avataar*. How are we to understand the processes of shifting yet dynamic nature of inclusion and exclusion in this politics? How much is to be related to the rhetoric, sloganeering, and political posturing and how much of it is realpolitik governance that assures castes and communities about the prospects and possibility of such politics? The society, thus separated by political groupings, often takes recourse to caste mobilization through the normative framework of social justice.

As its ideology and practice, populism pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice. How does such ideology deployed by bringing caste and community into popular discourse? How does the exhaustion of the earlier politics of 'social justice' being played out? The cracks within the backward caste groupings and sustained 'othering' of Muslim minorities provides an opportunity to reconfigure the meaning and manifestation of social justice beyond the groups that were considered to be the beneficiary of the caste-community coalition in the decades of 1990s and 2000s. Without probing much in the history, one needs to recall the political developments in the late 1980s that was craftily orchestrated, on the one hand, to accentuate the tension between Hindu majority and Muslim minority around the Babri masjid- Ramjanambhoomi dispute in Ayodhya (UP); and on the other hand mobilization of several backward caste to reimagine/rekindle their assertion within Hindu religious fold. This approach of politicizing caste and other disparities within the hindu fold manufactured a sense of inclusion. It provided a great opportunity to right-wing politics to flourish; however, it couldn't reach the pinnacle of success immediately. The left-to-centre and erstwhile socialist leaders coming from backward communities somehow halted the right-wing upsurge by swiftly implementing Mandal commission recommendations for reservation of backward classes in government jobs. This turned out to be the populist masterstroke that again exposed the inherent contradictions among caste Hindu and pitted them against the backward communities. The previous section, in a way, provides a glimpse of what happened thereafter and how populism of regional backwards caste leaders brought forth the new political lexicon and invoked vernacular style in political practice. With the process seemingly running its course, the right-wing populists learnt from the immediate past and tried to demonstrate ingenious political entrepreneurship. The game of politics was fundamentally altered; populism was practised with a mix of exclusion-inclusion and the strategy was a synthesis of modernity and tradition.

Further, the impetus of right-wing populist politics could get actualized through BJP's extraordinary communication strategies, customized for the specific target population. Engaging with the process, Mcdonnell and Cabrera (2019) emphasize that BJP's populism has focused on the communication style and/or the campaigning strategies of the leader, Narendra Modi, rather than the party and its ideology. The campaign made innovative use of new media technology while focusing on the "Gujarat model" of neo-liberal economic development credited to Modi as chief minister of that state,and his self-projection as the strong leader the country needed (ibid: 486). However, it would be simplistic to assign disproportionate credit to communication technology. In the backdrop

of a relatively less political savvy PM, Manmohan Singh of Congress between 2004-2014, dubbed as 'accidental prime minister', Modi continuously attacked the Congress party during the campaign as a group of a corrupt elite and railed against conspicuous "others", framed as falling outside the real Indian people. The antagonism between the "people and the elite" was carefully constructed both in 2014 and 2019 elections, and phrases like *naamdaar* and *khaasdaar* (elite versus working class),*Shahzada* and *Chaiwala/chowkidar* (dynast vs common man) were popularised and put in vigorous circulation. Though positioning of elite vs the people was portrayed beyond caste, however, behind this depiction, the diligent, sustained and decades of work by BJP/RSS leaders and cadre with caste groupings can easily be ascertained.

Authors have dubbed populism as 'thin-centred' ideology and it often required to be identified with one or the other ideologies or political approaches such as left-wing populism, right-wing populism, nationalist populism or regionalist populism. Populism has to be pre-fixed to comprehend its nature and character. Once it is pre-fixed, a sense of anxiety and apprehension vis-à-vis authority and control has to be amplified, and appeal for a change in favour of 'people' turns out to be essential characteristics of populist politics. The central populist message that politics has escaped popular control and that popular control has to be restored (Kriesi 2014: 363) was persuasively magnified by BJP in the psyche of people. The ambiguity, fluidity and multiple messaging became the hallmark on populism in the last decade in India. The spectacle of Anna-Movement followed by series of pan-Indian micro-mobilisation against corruption, actively supplemented by social and formal media construed the perception that popular control was eroding and it needed to be restored. The pre-election political development before 2014 general election was a classic example of denigration of the image of 'elite' cohort led by 'intellectual' PM who was 'remote-controlled' by dynastic family, fitted the bill for convincing people about the loss of popular control. This loss of control was to be restored, and the promise of restoration saw dynamic forms of construction of the image and innovative social engineering. Slandering of statements and policies of parties and politicians by opponents assisted in building the impression about the loss of popular control. The term is often employed in loose, inconsistent and undefined ways to denote appeals to 'the people', 'demagogy' and 'catch-all' politics or as a receptacle for new types of parties whose classification one is unsure of (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008).

In fact, the right-wing populism under the leadership of Narendra Modi mastered the art of catchall politics. Modi uses catchwords and phrases to define himself; portrays the self as a doer and builds his symbolism by associating himself with big ideas like development, corporations, national plans and Hindu Nationalism. Jaffrelot (2015) makes the point that Mr Modi projected his self-proclaimed achievements in the Indian state of Gujarat onto the national scene; his campaign was centred on him and his populism. He has a 'masculine, decisive image, an inflexible man of action'. Mr Modi seemingly symbolized Hindu Nationalism and the urge against corruption and the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Besides, Rao (2018) claims that Modi has established himself as a delegative democratic leader: strongly individualistic, but more of a Hobbesian than of a Lockean variety; expecting the voters to choose him, irrespective of their identities and affiliations; and presenting himself as the individual who is most fit to take care of the destiny of India. An astute populist, he could demonstrate the capacity to relate directly to the people by 'short-circuiting institutions' in order to be perceived as a man of the people and for the people. His projection of anti-elitism also takes other forms, such as projecting liberals (artists, journalists, academics) who critique the government as elites who are anti-nationals (Ranjan 2018).

To further understand the practice of this politics, Jaffrelot (2015) emphasizes that Modi valorised his modest origins vis-à-vis the Nehru/Gandhi family not only in class terms but also in

caste terms. He asserts that Modi was explicit in instrumentalisation of caste. As a Hindu nationalist trained in the RSS, he had never mentioned that he was an OBC till he had to canvass in states where caste signified in electoral politics more than in Gujarat. In Bihar, during a speech at Muzaffarpur, he mentioned his low caste origin and added,'The next decade will belong to the Dalits and backwards' (Palshikar and Suri 2017: 290). He could methodically and perceptively confront the hitherto triumphant march of 'social justice' parties that relied on caste management by keeping dominant backward castes at the centre of political practice. It changed the rules of politics and let other parties pander to caste arithmetic. Gupta (2019:24) explains that while other parties identified themselves with specific groups, Modi aimed for a consolidation of the rest. His opponents relied on the popular wisdom that caste numbers if appropriately aggregated, hold the key to winning votes. In the run-up of 2019 election, Modi aggressively attacked the opposition alliance in Uttar Pradesh and asserted that he belongs to the caste of all poor countrymen.

Two parallel patterns can be discerned from this practice of politics in the Hindi heartland. Through nuanced communication strategies, at macro-level, the appeal tends to undermine the importance of caste and devalue its electoral significance- this appeals to the upper caste who feel excited about the possibility of undermining backward caste dominance in state polity after 25 years.Modi targeted "people who play games in the name of caste" and advocated the realignment of society based on economic parameters. In political speeches, there was a conscious circumvention/refusal to acknowledge social backwardness and caste-based discrimination that the Hindu caste system inflicts on the marginalised communities from the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes. Narendra Modi also asserted that political leaders who fight elections on the plank of social justice would no longer be able to raise caste-centric issues, such as reservation, during campaigns. This is music to the ear of upper caste groups.

On the other hand, meticulous and grounded caste management takes place, both by BJP/RSS cadres in the electoral field and by the leaders at the organizational level. It has realigned the various caste groups across constituencies and ensured votes from these new combinations. It caters to all the groups that are either disillusioned with or not affiliated traditionally with either the Samajwadi Party (SP) or the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the case of UP and Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD) and Congress in the case of Bihar respectively. And that means marginalisation of Yadavs, Jatavs, and Muslims. While the BJP claims to look beyond caste and be an inclusive party, it clearly favours its historical support base (Upper caste and business community) and consolidates new caste groupings that have grievances with dominant backward castes, which mostly muster political influences in regional parties.Because of numerous reasons, especially the ascendance of Mandal politics and subsequent alliance between Muslims and dominant OBC caste groups in states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the upper caste support base of INC shifted towards BJP andnow increasingly associates itself with the BJP. BJP could successfully construct an impression that Congress has sided with anti-upper caste Mandal based parties, which would have been its alliance partners in case a non-BJP coalition government were to be formed at the centre. The BJP's efforts to neutralise upper caste anger were not confined to attacking the opposition only. Just on the eve of the 2019 general election, it came up with the populist masterstroke by ensuring 10% reservation for economically weaker sections among upper castes. Once again, the deployment of quota politics comes handy as a governing instrument. And the party could claim to attend the cause of the'people' against the better off, whether within caste Hindu or with non-dominant OBC and non-dominant SCs.

Maze of Caste and Dynamics of Populist Politics

A carefully constructed image of caring for poor among upper caste has had an impressive populist outcome. A multi caste alliance with large sections of Other Backward Classes by a subtle and not-so-subtle undermining of dominant Yadavs and by persuading the support of many Dalit sub-castes could be forged. Through this, BJP could come up with a new vocabulary of social justice. By portraying upper OBCs as the significant recipients of reservations and government benefits under 'social justice regime' so far, the BJP has been able to drive a wedge between the upper OBCs and the rest of the OBCs, who have lagged behind others in securing state patronage. Such social engineering has paid very well for BJP in UP in the 2014 general elections, in 2017 assembly polls, and the 2019 general elections; and in the general elections of 2014 and 2019 in Bihar. Conscious of the reality that Yadavs, Muslims and Jatavs together comprise around 40% of the electorate, the BJP had relied on mobilising the other 60% that includes upper castes, all backward groups except Yadavs, and all Dalit groups except Jatavs. Through a conscious attempt of an image makeover, the more significant number of OBCs and Dalits were accommodated in the party organization. To ensure that the upper caste support base is not affected, the inclusion was done through expansion of organisational structure rather than by replacing the earlier members. The BJP successfully claimed a political space among the castes and sub-castes that were disgruntled with the hegemony of the dominant intermediaries such as the Yadavs among the OBCs and Jatavs among the Dalits. BJP's success is attributed to its social coalitions and the political mobilisation of less dominant castes and sub-castes. The widespread appeal and tactical move helped the party consolidate the non-dominant OBCs and Dalits everywhere. They not only gave them political representation but also ensured they got a slice of public resources, that were earlier only shared by the politically well-represented dominant caste groups (Kumar 2019). The beneficiaries of the BJP's strategy were many caste groups like Dhanuks, Mauryas, Sakhyas, Dhobis, Khatiks, Rajbhars, Pasis and so on, which were numerically smaller than the dominant OBC and Dalit caste groups but formed a majority when put together. Having found representation and, thus, a new bargaining power, they backed the BJP in whatever it said and did. Besides, the idea of '*Samagra Hindutva'* (Narayan 2019) is invoked to integrate OBCs and scheduled castes within the *Hindutva* fold. Sustained efforts through cultural engagement also helped the party appropriate lower caste icons to widen the idea of *Hindutva.* Celebration of indigenous deities, folk heroes, traditions and other cultural symbolism are deployed to make claims of their integration within *samagra Hindutva.* Needless to mention, the agenda of Ram temple, common civil code and abolition of Article 370 remained the core of Hindutva mobilisation.

The expansion of social base was made possible by adopting different political strategies. Wankhade (2018) explains that BJP acknowledges that castes still function with distrust, animosity and jealousy towards each other and it encourages and politicises caste division so that no political collective, such as the Dalits or the OBC, can be formed. Therefore, aiding and promoting those caste groups that are willing to disturb the collective identity of the Dalits and the OBCs has become a prime strategy. Among the Dalits, the BJP is eyeing mainly to promote the Rajbhar, Pasi, Dhobi and Khatik castes as a counter block against the Jatav leadership of the BSP. Within the OBCs, the BJP has promoted the Mauryas, Kurmis and Lodhs as the leading flag bearers of Hindutva politics (Ibid). Suggesting the populist agenda, the author further elaborates how political announcements and policy-level promises by the BJP ensured keeping the caste tussle alive.

It is important to recall that a sense of separateness within backward castes is produced and stressed for the last two decades. On June 28, 2001, Rajnath Singh, then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, constituted a social justice committee with an intention to distribute the benefits of

reservation equitably among the groups comprising the Other Backward Classes.Though the committee's report was not implemented, the rationale of equity that informed the subdivision of the Other Backward Classes struck root, and the discourse was kept alive by BJP. The narrative's credibility depended on demonstrating how the Yadavs and Jatavs numerical dominance could be neutralised.By showing interest in the bifurcation of the reservation policy, the party stressed that select castes had monopolised maximum benefits of the reservation policy and therefore, it is time to reorganise the policy so that the benefits can also reach the most-backward castes. The strategy to forge political alliances against the politically favoured rested on bringing together the socially dominant but politically less influential upper caste and socially feeble and politically sidelined but substantial in numbers such as backwards and dalits (Jha 2017).

Further, the distrust and hostility that develops, puts 'people' against the 'new dominant caste'. In another way, one observes that BJPs political practice could consolidate the support of the "leftover" castes locally. In western UP, the Gujjar, Tyagi, Brahmin, Saini and Kashyap who are often not counted in the typical matrix, which fashioned for years based on the "dominant" groupings like the Jats, Muslims and Dalits (the Yadavs have a small presence in this region). The BJP discovered the untapped numerical potential of the unseen groupings. In the lower Doab, Avadh and eastern UP zones, the conception of the Yadav as "bully" and "oppressor" was played up by the BJP first to consolidate the votes of the upper castes and then regroup the non-Yadav backward castes and the disempowered Dalits. But true to the RSS's diktat, the tactic to isolate the Yadavs was calibrated skillfully to not entirely alienate Yadavs and importantly, not to lose sight of the Muslim as the main adversary of the Hindu. Gupta (2019) has invoked "mutual repulsion" to understand the context of such caste animosity in the Hindi heartland. Questioning the tendency of the monolithic construct of caste blocks, he iterates that such analysis ignores the deep cultural antipathy between castes in general. Much of this is fuelled by their respective origin tales and practices which are not just incommensurable, but competitive too. The BJP/RSS gradually engaged itself with this antipathy and competition and factored it well while coming up with social engineering of a newer kind. Somehow they could undermine the mutual repulsion by stitching a narrative that provides the political rationality for coming together of mutually antagonistic groups. The canvas prepared by the mix of nationalism, development and Narendra Modi's personality cult has brought the mutually repulsive castes come together because BJP had invested heavily in raising new and non-elite leadership among these castes, who successfully popularised the narrative and brought votes of their own castes into the BJP's kitty (Gurjar 2019).Nominating Kesav Prasad Maurya, a backward caste leader, as U.P. BJP president before the 2017 state assembly election and getting a Dalit, Ram Nath Kovind, elected as Indian president were carefully crafted moves and was strategically important in cementing BJP's appeal among the backward and Dalit castes in U.P.

Contemporary populism actively engages with the management of caste under the broader framework of social justice and thereby influences the nature of political discourse in the Hindi belt. The construction of the 'other' is realized and pursued through determined political processes on the ground. We have observed that the right-wing populism has employed the politics of anxiety and grievance within and outside the quota/representation politics. Grievance, anxiety and caste centric domination-subordination lend itself for a particular style or 'repertoire' of politics. Examining the political terrain in which right-wing populism is construed, Chantall Mouffe (2005: 72) argues "the response of traditional parties to the rise of right-wing populism has clearly contributed to exacerbating the problem …" (Mouffe 2005: 72). Drawing from the new demands on the politics of social justice, Gudavarthy (2018) believes that Right-wing populists sympathize with the declining social power of dominant social groups. "The outburst by Jats, Patidars, Marathas, Kapus, Kshatriyas

and other dominant castes is symptomatic of the anxieties that dominant castes experience during social transformation. Right-wing populism offers alternative ideas of social harmony, fraternal feelings and community fellow-feeling that ostensibly allow mobility for the subordinate groups and also empathise with the dominant groups and their declining social power." Prashant Jha (2017: 178) further explains this strategy: "*It was meant to make the Hindu bitter at what he was not getting; it was meant to make him feel resentful of the Muslim for being pampered; it was meant to bracket all other parties as pandering to specific interests based on religion. In the name of a common citizenry and an unbiased state, it was meant to divide communities.* "

This exemplifies what Richards (2013) calls 'emotional governance'. In such a context of populist politics, political leaders direct their emotional messages and appeal to an apprehensive and ontologically insecure electorate. Such insecurity gets further heightened through anti-establishment narratives that tend to rely on the trope of the 'betrayed people', in which the benefits of the welfare state have been 'sold out' or stripped off by embedded elites in the name of multiculturalism (Inglehart 2016). The supporters of such narratives often seek salvation in charismatic leaders who maintain direct links with them through public rallies and conventional and social media, allegedly articulating the so-called 'authentic' voice of ordinary people (Inglehart 2016). To further establish the authenticity, Modi's populism has manifested mainly in his claim as a "common man", fighting a corrupt system from the inside. In his first Independence Day speech in 2014, he declared: "I come from a poor family", and "I am an outsider for Delhi ... I have been quite isolated from the elite class of this place".

There is near consensus across the political divide about Modi's direct and unmediated communication with the people, and that is precisely the hallmark of his populist politics. Dissolving, to an extent, the line between politics from above and below, populism today both relies on and exceeds electoral democratic politics (Sinha 2017). Challenging the binary of elite and popular media, Sinha (2017) analyzes how the use of social media allowed the Modi campaign to access and enrol different social groups into a winning coalition behind his claims to a "developmental sovereignty" ratified by "the people". He further argues that populism muddies the distinction between bourgeois/subordinate; sections of the bourgeoisie and of subaltern groups combine under the leader into a new formation of the people (Sinha 2017). This is corroborated through the data of the latest parliamentary elections. Though the BJP leads over the Congress across all categories, its leads are the greatest among the richest and poorest voters, something that goes against the assumption that the rich and the poor have different political preferences (Kishore 2019).

To comprehend the nuances of his strategic appeal, Raja (2018) describes Modi's careful construction of the symbol;"He constructs himself as a balancing force between the wants of the poor and wants of rich, between the real world and dream world. He says that he balances between bio-toilets and bullet train, between 'Soil Health Card' and satellite and space technology. His symbolic existence stands as a bridge between such binaries. His symbolism has space both for the rural poor and the urban middle class that eyes at travelling in bullet trains. The dreams of all get a space in his magical sweep" (ibid). Modernization, development and neoliberal policies have been combined in an appeal to populist cultural politics, wielding together the concerns of both nationalist and neoliberal constituencies of voters (Kinnvall 2019). Portrayed as the founder of a 'new India', as a man of progress, growth and anti-corruption market-oriented policies, Modi reveals a cohesive populist narrative to a masculine state that can assert itself both globally and locally. His portrayal of self as a 'common man', from 'humble origins' and his resentment of the Indian English-speaking elite is aimed to reassert Hindu pride in response to Western dominance and upper-class antipathies (Kinnvall and Svensson 2019).

In a way, the populist politics of Modi claims to be democratizing in the sense that its attempts to create a singular people from the endless heterogeneity in society never succeeds, but "the attempt to construct such a bridge defines the . . . political articulation of social identities" (Laclau, 2007, p. 154) and brings into politics groups so far excluded from it. By dividing society into two antagonistic camps, populist discourses ultimately construct 'a people' as 'something less than the totality of the members of the community', while at the same time aspiring 'to be conceived as the only legitimate totality' (Laclau 2005, 81). The grievance of 'people 'drawn from a sense of being less than totality was tapped by right-wing populists, which offered the prospect of political space for making claims on the legitimate whole. However, the style, content and articulation of such offering remained abstruse.

Conclusion

Through this essay, I am arguing that both - left/socialist and right/nationalist - modes of populism appeal to and engage with caste management and social coalition in their practice of politics. And this is done through the framework of social justice, which informs us that populist mobilization is a political means that are deployed by contenders in pursuit of a wide range of social, political, and economic plan. The widespread acceptance for such politics tells us that the appeal resonates with sentiments and views already held in some form by a substantial segment of the society. Populism unites divergent grievances, discontents and claims to offers hope to a stigmatized group. The illustration of both - right-wing populism led by Modi and socialist-social justice populism led by Karpoori-Lalu Prasad - seems to support what Laclau elucidated. These are: (i) its ingrained hostility to the status quo; (ii) mistrust of traditional politicians; (iii) appeal to the people or masses and not to specific classes as such; and finally, (iv) its anti-intellectualism (Laclau 1979). The portrayal of self as a 'common man', assertions of belonging to 'humble origins' and depiction of antipathy towards the English-speaking elite is aimed to reassert claims of 'ordinary people' in popular politics. For both sets of populists, it is the people that are important rather than the institutions and undermining the institution turns out to be of strategic importance. Alternatively, both sets defy the conventional liberal logic and style of functioning of the institution by bringing a non-conventional style that often defies prescribed norms but appeals to ordinary people. However, the constitution of this 'ordinary people' varies from one to another form of populism. For the socialist, it is the subaltern masses at the lower strata of social hierarchy. For right-wing, polarization through explicit ethnocentric narratives helps in representing the majority as 'ordinary people'. Once this narrative gets traction, social engineering through caste management is deployed. The politics, policies and practices as also the overall populist discourse of these actors make it clear that the logic of populism is corresponding with the logic of politics *per se*; populism accompanies democracy as one of the indicators of procedural efficiency. It is also made to appear that populism is a democratic, horizontal and egalitarian discourse. Though constituencies overlap or vary, populist of both categories make successful use of the real or perceived sense of insecurity, grievance and anxiety in ensuring counter-mobilisation by political parties and leaders. Populist leaders, unlike unelected authoritarians, legitimise their power through electoral victories and project themselves as the sole representative of the will of the people. However, at the core of such politics resides ambivalence; the leaders retain a characteristic that has a way of conveying meaning, which is usually amorphous, uncertain, impermanent, prospective or ever-changing.

Through the illustrations, we observe that Populism is an outright political project, and the caste(s) rests at the centre of this project. In one case, 'the elite' and 'the other' comes mostly from

the upper caste/dominant class and in the later right-wing influenced one, the project mobilises diverse castes under the *samagra Hindutva* against the 'Muslim other', and this is done by making the majority community feel insecure. Here victimization of the majority becomes a common populist tactic that is being performed with the purpose of legitimizing 'authoritarianism and illiberal attacks on anyone who (allegedly) threatens the homogeneity of "the people" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017).The leaders in both situations do not merely represent "the people" but are actually seen as embodying "the people" (Moffitt 2016, 64). This is followed by populist aspirational appeals around the sense of grievance and anxiety, heightened around inter-caste antagonism. Such populist mobilization facilitates sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes the ordinary (Jansen 2012).

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