



Politics of Representation

Historically Disadvantaged Groups in India's Democracy

Edited by

SUDHA PAI
SUKHADEO THORAT

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New Delhi, India

Sudha Pai
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Introduction

Sudha Pai and Sukhadeo Thorat

Political representation is a cardinal feature of democracy, without which democratic institutions and structures cannot function. The literature on the subject covers many aspects ranging from electoral systems, institutional design, political parties, position of minorities and electoral politics. In fact, as a multi-faceted subject, political representation is integral to legislative governance. In this respect, representation is linked to improvement of legislative processes to ensure that large number of groups play a part in debating and commenting on the policymaking process. More specifically, political representation is important for the electorate as it determines both the manner in which representatives are elected, and the relationship between the elected members and their constituents.

However, the issue acquires much greater significance in culturally diverse countries such as India, when we examine political representation for disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled castes (SCs), Scheduled

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tribes (STs), minorities particularly those based on religion and women. India has tried since the early part of the eighteenth century to deal with this diversity in representation to numerous groups. However, the issue of representation of caste, religious, ethnic, racial and gender still poses problems, so does the question of electoral methods.

The papers presented in this volume engage first, with theoretical debates around the concept of representation and how these ideas apply to representation for selected disadvantaged groups in India. A historical backdrop of the position of these disadvantaged groups, and debates around reservations for them since the colonial period, are presented. The focus is on inclusion of SCs, Muslims and other minorities in the colonial period, the thoughts of Dr Ambedkar on political representation of minorities in general and SCs in particular in the 1920s and during the period of the signing of the Poona Pact. Also, how representation was debated and conceptualized in the constituent assembly for the STs, and how the ideas underlying representation and reservation for the tribal population are different from those framed for the SCs. Representation of other minorities, such as Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Parsis, which have not been adequately studied, is also taken up.

Against this backdrop, the second part of the volume shifts to empirical concerns and examines political representation of these disadvantaged groups in post-independence India. The experience of political representation of SCs, STs: the method of election, role of political parties in providing representation, role played by these groups in parliamentary institutions and the extent of their participation. Another significant area the volume attempts to cover is representation of the Muslim minority in parliament and state assemblies and understanding the reasons for their under-representation since independence, and more particularly in recent years. The question of why Muslims prefer to support mainstream parties has been explored; in this context, the experience of some newly formed and existing minority-based political parties are examined.

The issue of levels of participation and under-representation of women who constitute half the population, both in parliament and the state assemblies, is also examined. Although representation of women has been granted in local bodies leading to much greater participation in policymaking, the question of quotas for women in parliament and state assemblies is still pending. While it is argued that it is due to conflicting demands for inclusion of women from the OBC, minorities, Dalits and tribes, there are other institutional and societal reasons that need to

be analysed. An attempt is also made to study the representation of women in political parties, in their organization and in the distribution of tickets. Hence, the aim of the volume is to understand whether existing systems of representation adopted, and the mechanism through which they operate, have helped disadvantaged groups including importantly minorities and women, who are still struggling to gain special representation in parliament.

While the empirical studies do not ignore the immediate post-independence period, their focus is specifically on representation during the period of the 1990s and 2000s. These decades constitute a defining phase in Indian politics as they have witnessed key changes in the larger body politic in which representation takes place, that have impacted particularly on representation of disadvantaged groups. Political representation was not a controversial issue during the first few decades of independence when a single dominant party the Congress, which had promised protection of life, liberty and property to the disadvantaged sections, was in power. Despite this, the SCs did not gain much political clout from the reserved seats as most SC candidates selected by the Congress were loyal to the party, and not independent and free to represent the interests of their community. Nor did the Congress give tickets to many Muslim candidates, resulting in very few members from the community in parliament and in the state assemblies.

The collapse of the Congress and the rise of a multi-party system provided room for state parties, which came to represent the disadvantaged groups, such as the Socialist Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and regional parties in western and southern India. However, the 2000s have witnessed the revival of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu, right-wing party that espouses the ideology of Hindutva, attempts to make the Muslim the alien or 'other' and has also managed despite being an upper caste party, to garner the support of a section of the SCs and the BCs to come to power. The number of Muslims in the central parliament and in important states, such as UP, has witnessed a sharp decline. The attempt to introduce reservation of seats for women in the parliament continues to be debated and is also opposed by many parties.

A common thread that runs through the empirical studies is that there is a 'crisis' of political representation in India for disadvantaged sections, particularly where religious minorities are concerned, in the contemporary period. While there is undoubtedly a "shared crisis of representation"

in liberal democracies worldwide, as Vidhu Verma has pointed out in a recent study (2019), it is essential to outline the specific causes in India. India has witnessed the emergence of a Hindu majoritarian State, accompanied by an authoritarian and centralizing government, at the expense of representative institutions such as parliament and state assemblies, since the BJP assumed office in 2014. This has resulted in exclusion of disadvantaged groups such as SCs, STs and Muslims, but also rising communal polarization and divisions between the majority and minority community (Pai and Kumar 2018). In this context, a seminal question which arises is whether the unfolding crisis is due to the methods of representation adopted under the constitution, which were the end product of struggles and demands that arose in the colonial period. Have these mechanisms failed to deliver the promise that the makers of the constitution envisaged? Or, is it the fundamental political shifts that have taken place in post-independence India, necessitating re-thinking of the methods of representation and reservation granted to disadvantaged groups. Here, the question of granting reservation to Muslims and women in legislatures, so as to create a more inclusive pattern of representation, becomes important and is debatable. It is against this backdrop that we examine theories and debates around the concept of representation and their relevance in explaining the current crisis.

REPRESENTATION: THEORIES AND DEBATES

There is an extensive literature on the concept of representation, many different definitions are offered, yet it remains a contested idea. The literature on representation indicates that political scientists tend to focus on *formal-legal* procedures of authorization and responsibility. More attention has been paid to the design of representative institutions, such as legislatures, rather than to their actual functioning. Importance accorded to electoral procedures, often leads to discussions on the concept of political representation becoming discussions on voting behaviour and electoral democracy. Rather, political representation needs to be understood as a way of establishing the legitimacy of democratic institutions and creating incentives for governments to be open to citizens needs.

Much of the theoretical literature on political representation comes to us from western experience. The western concept of representation applies to fairly homogenized communities and deals with individual, rather than group interests and needs, and how representatives can work

to represent that of the former. In the Indian context, the extent to which social divisions are expressed politically has been contested for a long time. This is because we have a society characterized by multiple social groups based on caste, tribe, religion and other identities such as gender; class has not been as controversial as caste, religious and regional identities. Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar observed in 1945 that in societies characterized by diverse social groups, representation tends to acquire a ‘communal’ character; it is influenced by a communal majority (even if not fully determined), rather than by merit or issues. In so far as the identity of an individual belonging to a disadvantaged or minority community comes into play in representation, it poses the question of the need for representation to such social groups, in the context of a communal majority. Such countries are, therefore, faced with the problem of fair representation to minority groups. It also presents the problem of using an appropriate electoral method to ensure *real representation* of the minorities.

At the same time, a brief perusal of the literature in democratic theory on representation in the west is useful, as in recent years as there has been a marked departure from earlier narrower theoretical propositions, by drawing on how representation actually works in different contexts, which has greatly improved our understanding. Today, it is recognized that the concept of political representation has multiple and competing conceptions of how political representatives should represent constituents particularly disadvantaged groups, and the manner in which this inclusion can be made possible and guaranteed.

A recent essay by Stephanie Tawa Lama-Rewal draws attention to this development in the literature as well as its relevance to India (Lama-Rewal 2016). She mentions three aspects: “an understanding of the intrinsic plurality of the meanings and forms of political representation; the centrality and pervasiveness of representation processes in political life; and the constructivist dimension of political representation” (Ibid: 1). Arising out of this debate, what is central for our study is the multi-dimensional relationship between the representative and the electorate, which traditionally was treated as merely a relationship between the government and the governed. Some of these theoretical shifts are briefly discussed below.

The classical position on the subject is that of Hannah Pitkins who defined representation as “to make present again” (Pitkins, 1967). According to Pitkins, representation is acting or speaking on behalf of others thereby including their views in the policymaking process. Her

major contribution was categorizing the existing forms of representation, thereby promoting debate on their usefulness as, formalistic, symbolic, descriptive and substantive representation.

The problem for us with the first two is that they focus on the *formal-legal* procedures of how representatives gain power, whether they share common interests and experiences which make them acceptable to those they represent. It is the concepts of *descriptive* and particularly *substantive* representation that examine the actual functioning of a representative, whether their ideas and actions in reality represent and provide the interests and needs of those who are being represented. Another classical debate has been whether representatives once elected, should act as merely *delegates* or as *trustees*. The former simply follow the expressed preferences of the electorate which makes, representative government a delegation of political power to a small number elected by the rest (Madison et al. 1987). In contrast, as Edmund Burke argued, trustees are elected representatives who employ their own ideas of what they think is in the best interest of their constituents (Burke 1968: 115).

By the 1980s, Iris Marion Young's study, *Inclusion and Democracy* reflected greater awareness among scholars of the difficulties inherent in the process of one person representing many. Young argued for the need to recognize the great diversity of opinions in society, and the varied needs and interests of those being represented. Descriptive representation, she argued, must be understood as a differentiated relationship, in which institutions provide both inclusion and exclusion to the designated group (Young 2000, 125–127). Drawing on her study of the creation of black districts in the United States, she points out that while it might create safe zones for elected officials, it could actually lessen the accountability of representatives to the electorate. Thus, she held that much research was needed to examine the ways in which representative institutions marginalize the interests and opinions of the electorate, even in a democracy.

Melissa Williams' research, drawing on the experiences of historically disadvantaged groups, particularly African-American women in the United States, attempted to further redefine the idea of representation for such groups (Williams, 1998: 8). She points to the need to provide the disadvantaged, corresponding to different dimensions of their political life: voice, trust and memory. Voice means that they are represented by members of their own group whom they trust more than others, while shared memories of discrimination establish boundaries with other

groups. This means every minority citizen is represented by not just one vote, but by being part of an interest group.

Taking the argument further in the 2000s, Jane Mansbridge held that representation cannot be viewed as just a transactional relationship between the elected and the governed (Mansbridge, 2011: 621). She argues that different systems of representation can be employed simultaneously a democratic system; care is needed to select the system of representation best suited to a society. For example, descriptive representation works best in situations where, disadvantaged sections of society distrust the better-off groups and do not accord legitimacy to the system, in contexts where their political consciousness and ability to select representatives is not yet developed, there is lack of communication and mistrust, or where discrimination has been practised against them in the past. It is to overcome such problems that constructivist approaches to representation highlight the representative's function of determining the identities and needs of the constituents. Michael Saward's work emphasizes (2010: 4) the necessity of recognizing that instead of taking for granted the interests of the governed, representation is a "deeply cultural" project, which must take into consideration the embedded social habits and characteristics of a society.

Nadi Urbinati's study further added to the richness of the concept by bringing in the idea of representation being a form of support or advocacy (2000: 760). It means that representation is not merely a sum total of the interests in society but, it should also allow space for diversity and disagreement. This would preserve liberty, as it would both connect the representative to the electors' desires, but yet maintain the representative's independence of decision-making on behalf of the electors. This Urbinati feels would shift focus from issues of construction of institutional structures to deliberative democracy, allowing room for debate, opinions and formation of consensus.

The essays in this volume employ these contradictory and challenging definitions help understand representation for disadvantaged groups such as scheduled castes, tribes, minorities and women.

REPRESENTATION IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

The theories and debates discussed above have relevance for our study as they expand the notion of representation from the narrow conceptualization of this concept earlier, to include various marginalized sections.

However, in India, the idea of special representation for disadvantaged and marginalized groups such as SCs and STs is old, beginning in the colonial period. Various methods of representation and movements in support of them were put forward by leaders such as Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. During the national movement, values of secularism, equality, social inclusion and religious freedom provided the underlying support structure to the demand for special representation, leading to the establishment of reservation, together with universal adult franchise, in the Indian Constitution. At the same time, special representation to minorities and women were not instituted. They remain the unfinished tasks that many scholars feel need to be taken up today. The challenges to representation in post-independence India also come from the changes in the age, composition, legislative experience, educational level and the occupational background of members of Lok Sabha. Other themes include representatives as bound by dictates of the party, versus representing their constituents' interests. Thus, the usefulness and value of special representation have been largely accepted and a rich literature has developed around it; the question which is often raised and debated is how these have worked for the disadvantaged and marginalized groups in post-independence India. These aspects are discussed below.

The Indian Constitution provided for adult franchise based on the First Past the Post System, to all citizens, and reserved seats to SCs and STs in parliament and in state legislatures. It is noteworthy that these measures were granted long before the concept of recognition of disadvantaged categories came to be recognized in the west in the 1960s with the rise of the civil rights movement by African Americans under the leadership of Martin Luther, leading to Affirmative Action. Hence, the debate on special representation for SCs in India pre-dates that of the west, but has become important today due to questioning at times of both the *continued need* for such representation and the effectiveness of the *method* by which they are provided. A central question is of *real versus nominal representation*, and whether the method of election in reserved constituencies allows election of independent candidates, or do they tend to be nominal representatives of SCs and tribal communities.

Electoral or *political* reservations were provided, as the SCs based on their low caste identity and their status as a minority in the population, suffered discrimination in the electoral process. Therefore, the instrument of reservation was used for providing SCs a fair share in political

power. The importance attached by the founding fathers of the constitution to reserved seats can be seen from the fact that among the wide array of preferential schemes for disadvantaged groups such as SCs, this is the only scheme that is provided for specifically within the constitution. All other constitutional provisions for preferences are merely authorizations empowering the State to make provision for disadvantaged groups (Galanter, 1984: 45). The founding fathers hoped that the provision of reserved seats would provide SCs an opportunity not only to enter political institutions, but throw up leaders who would devote themselves to the specific interests of the community.

SC Representation: Real or Nominal

It has been debated whether a system of reserved constituencies for SCs—which are few in number compared to the large number of general constituencies, and which in most cases have no more than about 20% of SCs in the electorate—has served this purpose. In one of the first assessments of the system, Mark Galanter’s calculations showed that among the 76 constituencies reserved for SC in the 1962 elections, there were none in which they were a majority of the population and only 13 in which they were as much as 30% (Galanter 1984). The bulk of the constituencies contain between 10 and 30% SC population. Thus, the vast majority of SCs live outside the reserved constituencies. Of the 111 constituencies in which SC constituted more than 20% of the population in 1961, only 46 were reserved, whereas 29 constituencies with less than 20% were reserved. There are also problems about the manner in which the system works. In assessing the quality of representation afforded by these representatives, it is necessary to remember the “structural constraints” imposed by the arrangements for reserved seats. The reservations are designed in a manner, which both “filters and muffles” the representation of the interests of the SC insofar as they diverge from those of other groups. On the one hand, the reserved seat legislator is responsible to a population overwhelmingly made up of non-SC persons, and yet, on the other hand, he is expected to represent the interests of his own community, which is a difficult task (Ibid.)

This raises the question whether the policy of granting reserved seats has achieved limited success and whether it was mainly a symbolic gesture which legitimized the newly formed Indian state which enabled the national leadership to co-opt and gain support of the SCs. But Galanter’s

study pointed out that SCs would not have gained entry into legislatures, particularly in the early years of independence in the absence of reserved seats. In the first six Lok Sabhas, only a handful of candidates from the SC or ST community could win on unreserved seats—five were elected in 1971 and three in 1977 (Ibid. 49). In the lower houses of the state legislatures, the situation was no better, although the smaller constituencies mean that local concentrations of population and resources should offer greater chances of success. For example, in 1970–1971, there were only three SC and two ST Representatives sitting in the 2,853 non-reserved seats in the Vidhan Sabhas (Ibid.).

Thus, the presence of SC members in the state legislatures, until the emergence of SC parties such as the BSP in the 1980s, was almost entirely due to the provision of reserved seats. There is no constitutional requirement for reservation of political appointments within the legislatures or the government, such as cabinet ministerships. But, it early became the convention to have at least one SC cabinet minister at the Centre and in each of the states, and these were chosen largely from the reserved seats. Thus, reservations have provided a substantial quantitative presence that would otherwise be lacking. Galanter points out that the importance of reserved seats is seen in the fact that the press, public and political parties have supported the extension of reserved seats every ten years, as if the end to these reservations would be end to all reservations, though there is little constitutional ground to justify such an idea. He argues that this symbolic function may tell us something important “about the way in which political reservations function to lock into place all the other programmes for SCs and STs” (Ibid: 55). Finally, in his study, Galanter has observed that although the SC representative may have influenced the decisions made in the legislature in small measure, they have helped to shaped policies through committees attached to the various Ministries, in a significant manner. Adoption of Special Component Plan for SC, renaming of Untouchability Offence Act 1955 in Protection of Civil Right Act, are few instances. This has been relatively quiet action, but meaningfully effective. Similarly, the SC/ST forum has come together on very crucial issues and not allowed decisions to go against their interest (Ibid.).

A more recent study by Francesca R. Jensenius analyses the longer term consequences of electoral reservations since 1951, the longest lasting quota system in the world (Jensenius 2017). She argues that reserved quotas have played an important role, primarily by weakening the status

hierarchy associated with the caste system. The study examines three dimensions in the working of the system of reservation: *political participation, redistribution and recognition*, at the level of the elite and the general population. Her findings are that electoral quotas for SCs have opened the political arena and provided participation to many who would have been excluded, allowed them to gain experience and confidence in mobilizing voters and seemed to have contributed to making it less socially acceptable to discriminate against SCs in public, and helped alter stereotypes. For example, SC politicians are not treated badly by constituents, as they need them to promote development in their region. But, quotas have had no detectable effect on overall development or redistribution to SCs, the electoral turnout is lower in reserved constituencies and critics of the system hold, it brings the “wrong” SC politician to power.

Finally, as reserved seats are designed, they incentivise mainstream political parties to recruit and support SC politicians and to increase their number. So, in many ways, the quota policy has a moderating or “centripetal” effect, creating incentives for the gradual integration into and recognition of SC politicians, by the mainstream political elite. SC politicians have to work for all the people in their constituency, not just the SC members. Therefore, the political inclusion of SCs through the quota system has resulted over time in “*group integration but not group representation*”. In sum, the importance of quotas has been, not in bringing material benefits, but making a dent politically in one of the world’s most rigid hierarchies. But, she does agree, that this process has been slow and partial and the number of SC politicians who have entered the mainstream has not been many.

Another study, which analysed the longer term impact of the policy of reserved seats on bringing SCs into the political mainstream, argues that the impact has been *limited* (Pai 2005). Examining the impact of electoral reservation on SC politics from 1952 to 2002 in reserved constituencies in UP, vis-à-vis voting trends in general constituencies. It found that despite the fact that reserved seats were granted based upon the principle of identity, they have not impacted significantly upon electoral outcomes, or created independent voting patterns in the post-independence period. Rather, voting behaviour on reserved seats have paralleled those on the general seats and reflected the larger changes taking place within the polity, particularly shifts in the party system and re-alignments among parties. The reserved seats have been tied for a large

part of the post-independence period with the fortunes of the Congress party, often described as appendages of the party. A persistent feature has been that SCs have through reserved seats supported the dominant political party at any point of time in UP. They have not hesitated to shift their support to other parties whenever the dominance of the Congress has been challenged or during periods of weakness (Ibid).

More importantly, the study found that the role played by the policy of electoral reservations in the construction of *dalit* identity and a *dalit*-based party, devoted exclusively to the protection of the interests of SCs, has been *very limited*. The rise of an educated, vocal, middle class within the SC community, leading to emergence of *dalit* identity is the result of changes within *society*: namely the impact of reservations in the field of education and employment and increasing democratization of the society and polity since independence. The success of the BSP in the 1990s in capturing power is not due to use of reserved seats, but mobilization based upon a clear-cut identity by a strong and confident leadership, which can no longer be co-opted by mainstream parties as in the past. It has relied on political strategies such as opportunistic coalitions, ticket distribution to non-*dalits* and electoral competition, rather than reserved seats to enter the legislature or widen its support base (Ibid).

ST Representation: Isolation and Marginalization

The large majority of the ST population constitutes the poorest and most marginalized sections of Indian society, though this is more true of those residing in central India, than the northeast. While the constitution provided political representation through reserved seats to STs, the underlying reasons are different from those in the case of the SCs. STs experienced marginalization from mainstream society during the colonial period. In the northeast, the Inner Line regulation which kept out non-tribals led to isolationism. In central India, there was massive exploitation of the forest areas where many lived, that affected their livelihoods, allowed the entry of ‘outsiders’ who posed a threat to their culture and values, leading to autonomy movements against the British colonial authorities (Pai 2021: 357). A second major difference is that while the SC population is dispersed over large areas, the ST population is concentrated in three zones: (i) the north and north-eastern zone, (ii) the central or the middle zone and (iii) the south zone (Ibid). While the northeast has the largest proportion of the tribal population, in the central zone

over half the tribal population is concentrated in five states, with (undivided) MP, the state with the largest tribal population. Consequently, the tribal population is concentrated within the reserved constituencies and political parties have to keep this in mind in the selection of candidates. Third, the question of tribal representation has many dimensions: territory, cultural identity and material ones such as *jal jungle aur jameen* (water, forests and land) (Pai 2010: 179).

An important debate in the colonial and immediate post-colonial period was whether tribes constitute a ‘special category’ and the policy of representation to be adopted towards tribal communities. This debate was part of the controversy over the issue of ‘protection versus assimilation’ with Verrier Elwin holding that there was need for special policies to safeguard the rights of tribals as they constituted a distinct community with their own socio-economic system and past history of disempowerment (Guha 1996). Ghurye (1963), on the other hand, believed that the existing cultural differences between the tribes and the Hindu population were not enough to give them special status. While the position of the Indian State has been one of integration of tribals into the larger society, scholars have argued that this ‘integration’ has impacted negatively, earlier ‘invasions’ of outsiders into tribal territory, and identity definition for the tribals after independence has been largely ‘a process from outside’ (Xaxa 2008). Considering these differences, it was realized that unless special arrangements are made, the tribal communities would not be able to represent themselves in the state assemblies and the Parliament. As a consequence, the constitution of independent India through Articles 330 and 332 provided political reservation for tribes in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, respectively.

However, as in the case of SCs, reserved seats have not helped STs to acquire political consciousness, leadership in legislatures or influence making of public policy. Studies show that while the presence of tribal representatives in legislative bodies has helped attract attention to their problems, it has not translated into policies (Pai 2010). Tribals have suffered lack of arable land and felling of forests, large-scale displacement due to building of big dams, accompanied by lack of adequate compensation and rehabilitation by the state. Despite all the welfare and development projects by the government in the tribal regions, tribal groups have not benefited, rather have lost their livelihood sources. Often the members on reserved seats are controlled by a non-tribal leadership (Ibid). But, Galanter has argued that reservation has enabled STs to enter

into legislatures and led to emergence of small political elite that might have been lacking otherwise (Galanter 1984). Some tribal leaders, such as P. A. Sangma, Shibu Soren, Babulal Marandi, Ajit Yogi, are the product of political reservation, and they have formed their own political parties, which eventually countered the potential discrimination and marginalization that usually occurs in national political parties, and freed them from being merely followers of non-tribal leadership.

In the northeast, Sajal Nag points out that the seven sisters or states of the Northeast constitute a region overwhelmingly tribal, who are in some parts largely Christian (Nag 2015: 297). But, a recent study shows, that while the tribal people are politically dominant due to the large number of reserved seats over the plains people in the hill states, the plains people control large parts of the economy, notably secondary and tertiary economic occupations (Kumar 2005). Pointing to Bengali dominance in Tripura as an example, the tribal leaders of the other hill states have demanded restrictions on activities of non-tribal people, as allowed under the Sixth Schedule. There are also tensions between the different tribal groups within each state, where the more developed tribes view the less developed as a handicap, and both see further separation as a solution. In 1995–2005 there were violent clashes between Nagas and Kukis, between Kukis and Tamils in Moreh, and between Pangals and Meteis. The Hmar continued to agitate to join Mizoram during this period (Ibid). Thus, political representation in the northeast has different dimensions: ethnic movements and clashes between tribal and non-tribal people.

In central India, it is rising political consciousness since the 1990s, leading to greater participation in voting, revival of demands for a tribal state in central India and formation of small, but independent political parties that have provided greater political representation in the legislature, than presence in reserved seats (Shukla 2018). The idea of a separate tribal state combining the Chota Nagpur and Santhal Parganas regions from erstwhile Bihar with tribal-dominated districts in neighbouring Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, much as was proposed to the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) in the 1950s has re-emerged in the 1990s and 2000. Movements are also visible for a Gondwana tribal state in central India in the 1990s (Mollick and Mukherjee 1999: 279), and in 2008 Bheelistan by the Bhils, greater Jharkhand by the JMIM comprising of parts of adjoining West Bengal and Odisha, and the unity of all tribal regions by the JAYs in MP whose slogan has been '*ek teer ek kaman, saare adivasi ek saman*' (one bow, one arrow, all tribals are equal)

under which they want to unite and fulfil the basic needs of all the tribal population (Pai 2021: 356). The demand is not just for territory but the integrity of the cultural ethnic identities divided among various states.

Stuart Corbridge has pointed out that the formation of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in 2000, both portrayed as tribal states, has not provided greater representation, or share in political power or policymaking. Tribal leaders feel that the narrow political interests of the Congress and the BJP drove the formation of these states. In the case of Jharkhand, particularly, it was viewed as “detrribalizing territory” as the state came into the hands of *dikus* (rapacious outsiders) or *sadans* (long settled mainly agricultural communities) (Corbridge 2015: 74). The formation of Chhattisgarh out of MP has once again divided the tribal population between two states in central India.

In MP, political consciousness among the bigger tribes and heightened competition in the 2000s between the Congress and the BJP for the tribal votes led to the formation of parties by the tiny elite that has emerged among the major tribes: the Gondwana Gantantra party of the Gonds (GGP) in the 1990s (Mollick and Mukherjee 1999: 279) and the Jai Adivasi Yuva Shakti (JAYS) by the Bhils and the JAD by the Barela tribals in 2018 following division of the state (Pai forthcoming). However, these developments have not provided an independent space to these tribal groups to negotiate their demands, rather they have become enmeshed in the highly competitive politics between the Congress and the BJP. They remain small players limited to their own regions, unable to gain substantial number of seats. Parties formed by tribal leaders in Jharkhand such as the JMM and JVM have been more successful in their attempts to preserve tribal culture; in the recent assembly elections in December 2019, the JMM has emerged as the single largest party, formed the government with the Congress and pushed back the BJP which it accused of encouraging a non-tribal leadership.

Minority Representation: Under-Representation and Decline

For historical reasons, most importantly partition, the issue of political representation of Muslims has remained a troubled issue in the post-independence period. Muslims constitute the largest and most important religious minority in India making up as much as 172.2 million or 14.2% of the population in India (Census 2011). While the constituent assembly

granted reserved seats to the SCs and STs based on historical disadvantage, it was decided that separate representation for minorities based on religion, should not be a feature of the new Republic. At the same time, following a lengthy discussion, the constituent assembly decided that there should be freedom to practise as well as propagate religion.

A major problem underlying the issue of representation to Muslims in post-independent India is that it is closely bound up with the relationship between the majority and minority community. The granting of special representation to Muslims in the central legislature in 1905 has been described by scholars as a strategy of 'divide and rule' by the British, which created differences between Hindus and Muslims that were to have an impact on their participation and representation in politics in post-independence India.

Much scholarship suggests that until the late eighteenth century, the categories described as Hindu and Muslim in India were malleable, not clearly defined and marked by immense internal differentiation. The emergence of religious differences was a gradual and progressive development reaching a peak only in the late colonial period, an end product of the experience of colonialism and the fundamental socio-economic changes that it unleashed in Indian society. While Francis Robinson has argued that there were 'fundamental' religious differences between Hindus and Muslims in the nineteenth century before community-based mobilization began, based on issues such as idol worship, cow protection and monotheism, which created a 'basic antipathy' between them (Robinson 1975). More recent literature has held that religious communities began to be defined more sharply during the colonial period, false totalities of ready-made religious communities of 'Hindu', 'Muslim' and 'Sikh', which ignored existing internal differentiation within these communities (Pandey 1990: 3). Brass has argued that while there were differences between the Hindu and the Muslim communities that cannot be ignored, the role played by elite groups, the balance between the rates of social mobilization and assimilation between different communities, organizations that promoted group identities, and impact of colonial policies, played an important role (Brass 1991). Thus, by the early twentieth century, being Hindu or Muslim became politically significant in ways quite different from earlier times and was exacerbated later due to partition.