

Caste, Class and Politics in Contemporary North India

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The binary relationship between caste and politics is trotted out for re-examination whenever there's a major election. That caste affiliation is a fundamental determinant of political calculation and voting patterns is a commonplace of academic and street discourse. Even when the relationship is complex, and not easily reducible to a limited set of factors, it acts as a matrix which encloses the electoral field. This is usually denied or deplored by the urban upper class which occupies the apex of the social structure and whose concerns and ideology are reflected in the mainstream media. But for the overwhelming majority of the Indian bourgeoisie, attached in some way or the other to the countryside, caste considerations usually govern political affiliation either directly or indirectly.

Gramsci saw political parties essentially as vehicles of class interests; often in the case of formations representing the bourgeoisie, the interests of different fractions of the same class¹. The interests of the working class (and revolutionized peasantries) were expressed by the organized left, represented in the inter war years by communist parties of unequal strength. The largest was destroyed by the Nazis but some of the other west European communist parties (the French and the Italian for example) emerged as major electoral forces after the Second World War thanks to their leadership of national movements against German occupation. The dream of peaceful revolution achieved within liberal democratic structures flickered briefly once again before skilful manipulation by the liberating Anglo American armies in alliance with the non communist wings of the motley united fronts against German occupation, achieved partly by force (manipulation of the first post war Italian election), partly by aid (the Marshall Plan) and partly by propaganda snuffed it out. Well before that, the sectarian divisions within the communist parties (fanned by direct hegemony of the RCP over the European Left and its determination to subordinate its separate interests to the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy) and the reformist tendencies of their right wings had exposed the fact that their revolutionary potential was a good deal less than certain in spite of a common core programme. The only revolutions that took place were in Eastern Europe and these were revolutions 'from above', catalyzed by Soviet armies on their march to Berlin: mass membership of left parties east of the Elbe was a good deal weaker than in western Europe.²

The point is that for about a hundred years up till the 1960s the interests of the industrial proletariat as well as some parts of the peasantry in certain countries (Spain for example) were expressed both ideologically and programmatically by organized political formations that at times appeared close to winning power in democratic elections; and in one case (Spain) actually succeeded in doing so briefly. This holds true even after taking into account the sectarianism, the struggles over ideology and programmes and the splits that mark this period. The decline of these mass parties into impotence in the 70s and 80s is a separate story, linked partly to the enormous economic and social transformations in Europe after the second world war, and partly to their own abdications (the failure of the FCP in 1968³). In India however the mass of the peasantry and the rural proletariat along

with the unorganized industrial working class has never been represented by *any* political formation in spite the rhetoric deployed by the main political parties. They have voted, they have been affiliated in one way or the other to these parties, true; but they have not been *represented* by them if representation is defined as a programmatic expression of class interests articulated wherever and whenever possible in action. The organized left, the CPI and the CPI(M), represented these sections briefly in two different corners of the country before adapting to the roomy cage of liberal democracy. The parties and movements of the extreme left are small and scattered, occupying no more than enclaves that they've succeeded in maintaining. Frequently their struggles, as in Bihar, represent the only organized resistance by the rural proletariat to the grinding oppression of the social structure; but sectarianism, a policy of destructive and random violence and overwhelming state power precludes any linking up or establishment of a truly radical, truly national party. The internal divisions in Indian society, however permeable in different contexts, (and not just those of caste) have maintained the political equilibrium that was built up during the course of the anti colonial struggle and fructified in the decades after independence.

At bottom this equilibrium represented a combination of the rural bourgeoisie – large and middle landowners expressed in caste terms for north India as feudal or semi feudal groups of mainly Rajput and Brahmin zamindars or landholders, many of whom had begun adapting to the Gandhian Congress well before 1947, as well as farming castes working middle or large landholdings who had adapted to commercial agriculture such as the Jats and the Jat Sikhs (Punjab, Haryana, western UP, Rajasthan), the Patidars (Gujrat) and the Marathas (western Maharashtra) – with the urban bourgeoisie (composed principally of traditional merchant and clerkly castes; Jains, Marwaris, Kayasths etc.) and petty bourgeoisie. It was primarily representatives of both these groupings who had begun diversifying into industry (albeit at unequal rates) and, having invested in education, made up the bulk of the bureaucracy. Amongst the Muslims, landowning and trading groups were full partners in this equilibrium; the same is true of other major religious groupings such as Sikhs and Christians. The rural and urban underclass was effectively excluded – Dalit and tribal groups, former artisanal castes amongst both Hindus and Muslims (reaching large proportions in the north and east), castes of marginal landholders, the expanding unorganized industrial sector and casual wage labourers of every kind.

Excluded in terms of effective power but not unaffiliated to the major political formations which represented the sometimes contradictory class interests of the two wings of the bourgeoisie that shaped the Indian state. For in the political framework of liberal democracy based on universal suffrage their consent had in some measure to be won and, more importantly, mobilized into votes in the electoral arena. The political field was, and is, divided into parties that taken together express the interests of the bourgeoisie. This is even more obvious now than in the fifties and sixties (where the interests of the two symbiotic allies could occasionally diverge) now that all the major political parties, whether national or regional, adhere to a roughly identical economic programme – the Congress initiated the economic 'liberalization' of the 1990s; the BJP, supported by parties like the TDP and the BJD, is carrying it forward. It should be noted that this liberalization does not necessarily represent a sharp break with the economic policies of the past. The first four decades after independence were essentially a period of

state capitalism built on expropriation of the natural resources of the poor and targeted subsidies to the rich. Protectionism helped build private industry, a large part of which was insulated from labour demands by the creation of a small scale sector that enabled small and middle entrepreneurs to avoid unionization, keep wages low and evade taxes with the complicity of the state machinery. Controls on large scale industry were double edged but ultimately beneficial to the parties concerned, enabling the creation of near monopolies in limited markets. The Green Revolution was a gigantic system of state subsidies provided to the most prosperous class in the countryside. The public sector built infrastructure but that was not its only function; public sector industries as well as a ramifying bureaucratic apparatus absorbed a large mass of the educated from both the wings of the bourgeoisie, tightening its grip over the state as well as providing an indispensable channel for patronage and clientage. State employment has been a reliable road to wealth and social prestige (reckoned both comparatively and absolutely) since at least the beginning of the colonial period; its also by far the best source of direct patronage. In India the system enables the bourgeoisie to expand available opportunities as well coercive control. In tribal regions, state employment still remains the most widespread, sometimes the only, way of rising to the ranks of the middle class.

This bureaucratic apparatus typically was (and is) unaccountable; it is also marked by abysmal levels of productivity and efficiency. This is not in the least surprising considering the operation of the system as a whole. The administrative machinery does not need to be either productive or efficient either because the services it provides (primary education and health for example) are largely utilized by the poor who don't count and therefore obtain them only nominally. Its other functions (protection of life and property etc.) are performed reasonably efficiently where the middle class is concerned, in particular through a system of influence and bribery and hardly at all in the case of the poor. Its no accident that the largest and most powerful trade unions in the country are unions of state functionaries: the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission were an index of the power of this group, derived overwhelmingly from the bourgeoisie and intermeshed with it.

Behind these policies lay a widespread and invisible system of expropriation – of commons such as forests (used by tribal groups), destroyed by dam and mining projects or simply parcelled out, legally and illegally, to contractors; coastlines where subsistence fishing communities were driven out by mechanized trawlers; land, through acquisition for infrastructure and industrial projects in which poor and marginal groups were and are overwhelmingly affected (hydroelectric and mining projects tend almost without exception to be in regions occupied by marginal groups). The volume of human displacement generated by these expropriations provided cheap labour for capitalist agrarian development in regions like south Gujrat and western Maharashtra and enabled increasing rates of accumulation by the rural bourgeoisie. In addition, the fiscal resources of the state, derived mainly from undifferentiated taxes like the excise, were parcelled out unequally, subsidizing the bourgeoisie at the cost of the poor. In health and education the infrastructure created by public funds with concentrated for the use of the middle class; the state's achievements in primary health and education speak for themselves.

These policies were not the result of conscious design; they were and are the organic expression of class interest. In the same way the liberalization of the 1990s in an essential way carries forward the policies of the past. With a fairly secure material basis –

in agriculture, in industry, in administration – established and with the increasing permeability of the its two wings, now gradually coalescing into one (as the political career of Mulayam Singh Yadav demonstrates), the bourgeoisie is strong enough and confident enough to jettison the ideological and social safety nets of the past and to cannibalize parts of itself in the interests of the whole. With increasing rates of internal differentiation, control of state policy has passed from the hands of the middle to the upper class, the elite of the industrial and financial bourgeoisie with their natural allies, agrarian capitalists, fully developed in pockets all over the country. Increasing rates of accumulation at the top can only be driven by abandoning the old safety nets, not at the bottom (these were never created) but at lower levels of the same class. If more efficient administration, better specialized infrastructure and a freeing up of fiscal resources requires a reduction the number of state functionaries, than this wing of the middle class must accept greater insecurity (without however being made more accountable). Its revealing however of its grip on political power, and the importance of patronage, that in spite of countless pronouncements by the reform wing of the bourgeoisie very little downsizing has actually taken place.

The consent, willing and unwilling, of sections of lower castes and tribal groups to this arrangement, and their electoral mobilization, was won by two methods. One was the contradiction between rhetoric and program which is a more or less essential feature of political discourse in the framework of *any* bourgeois democracy. The Congress rhetoric of land reform before and after 1947 is an outstanding example; so were such inchoate but potent slogans as Garibi Hatao. This tactic developed in sophistication till nowadays it nearly approaches the European model: generalizations and promises emptied of any programmatic content. Nationalism, always an effectively vague hot button, has now been yoked to religion by the BJP producing a cocktail designed to drown out alternative political discourse. This effectiveness of this tactic is only partly explainable by the lack of alternative representations: the historic weakness of the Indian left is due less to objective factors (the fissions of caste society which as we shall see make purely class organization difficult) than to its ideological and organizational weaknesses. But it was also aided by concrete events. Its Gandhian legacy ensured a large measure of Dalit allegiance to the Congress (although where a more militant alternative existed as in Maharashtra, they tended to go over to it). The holocaust accompanying Partition combined with the unflinching commitment to secularism of the left wing of the post independence Nehruvian Congress (compatible on the ground with a good deal of ‘soft Hindutva’) meant that Muslim voting patterns tended to cut across class lines (as they still does to a variety of secular parties in different parts of the country). The legacy of a successful anti colonial struggle, where an omnibus but essentially bourgeois party claimed to speak for the whole of Indian society, as well as certain key social policies (reservations for example), were just as important. Taken together they enabled the Congress to largely monopolize political representation in the 1950s.

The broad contours of caste allegiance to different parties of the rural urban bourgeoisie in subsequent decades are generally accepted. The Congress represented a coalition of the upper (Brahmin-Rajput-Bhumihar), trading and clerkly (Kayasth) castes along with prosperous Muslim groupings for whom a section of Dalits, tribal groups and poorer Muslims tended to vote. The middle farming castes, exemplified by the Jats, tended to coalesce around competing parties. The numerically insignificant right,

represented by the Jan Sangh, was built around an ideologically committed core derived almost exclusively from upper and trading castes. These are, of course, not numerical absolutes but *tendencies* or better still, clusters. Not all Jats vote for a single party in any state any more than all Brahmins or Rajputs – if that was the case Haryana would never have had a Congress ministry. Caste is never entirely monolithic: there are always divisions and factions, specially at the upper levels. But the larger section of each caste that makes up the bourgeoisie tends to support a particular party tied to its social interests against a background of economic identity that cuts across caste. The opposition parties in UP and Bihar have traditionally functioned as vehicles of social and political assertion by farming castes against the traditional primacy of Rajputs and Brahmins (although competition *amongst* different farming castes, as in Bihar, can split allegiance). These tendencies are either stable or fluctuating, depending upon different factors in different regions. The Patidars of Gujrat for example have gradually transferred their support from the centrist opposition to the BJP. At the other end of the spectrum, Jhabua district in western MP returned a number of socialist MLAs in the 1950s, then became a Congress stronghold, now stormed by the RSS through organized propaganda in a climate of rapid and unstoppable acculturation. There are concentrations, regions and periods where caste support for particular political parties tends to be both stable and intense – the Dalit vote in UP over the last decade for example: these usually play a decisive role in electoral politics.

Dalit support for the Congress was always tepid based in equal parts on the lack of an alternative, its legacy as the originator of positive discrimination policies, and social intimidation. The temporary support of a party controlled by the apex of the caste structure by the bottom (or a section of the bottom) is perhaps explainable by the social competition between farming castes and the traditional elite of Brahmins and Rajputs on the one hand and growing economic tension between these castes and landless Dalits on the other. The economic structure of the Indian countryside has always been based on the brutal exploitation of subordinated castes and tribal groups; middle and large landholders who've made the transition to capitalist or semi-capitalist farming are drawn almost exclusively from the upper and middle farming castes. The classification 'backward' applied to castes such as Patidars and Yadavs has very little to do with landholding status and power relations vis a vis landless groups; it merely reflects the political assertion of some kind of parity with the upper castes. The Jats (and Jat Sikhs) had begun to seek a political role commensurate with their dominance of the countryside as early as the 18th century⁴. The Patidars of Gujrat began their rise towards the middle of the 19th⁵; the Yadavs, squeezed between the landless and the traditional feudal elite in eastern UP and Bihar, capitalizing on opportunities to transform and extend their landholdings are the latest examples of a familiar pattern. It is therefore in the interests of *all* middle and large farmers whether Rajput-Brahmin or Jat-Yadav to maintain the subordination of the landless and smallholding castes. But perhaps class tension between upwardly mobile backward castes such as Yadavs and Dalits is felt more intensely than the older opposition between the traditional elites and the landless. Perhaps *any* purely economic explanation is insufficient in a society atomized into cells and levels in which a rise in status for any particular group involves asserting its superiority over groups below it in order to compete socially and politically with the groups above.

Different states and regions in north and west India will show variations from this simplified and somewhat elementary pattern of caste affiliation for different periods up till the 1990s. The elections of 1977 and 1984 produced a mass transfer of votes – against the Congress in the first case and to it in the second. The reasons lie outside traditional caste affiliations. But the point is that all the mainstream parties excluding the left represented a united front of the two wings of the bourgeoisie which were gradually becoming increasingly intermeshed. Certain castes such as Brahmins had as rich landowners, traders and administrators always straddled both categories. With increasing technical education and the steady expansion of the state apparatus, opportunities of diversifying into trade, industry and administration and consequent absorption into the urban bourgeoisie were opened to the farming castes as well. The Green Revolution with its disproportionate benefit to the rural bourgeoisie was a programme that testifies to the essential symbiosis of the mainstream political formations. The framework of the system allowed the absorption of a tiny elite created within subordinated groups in one way or the other, mainly through reservations, into this arrangement at a clearly subordinate level. And in the ultimate analysis consent was wrung through coercion; for example the electoral intimidation of Dalits, a truly national phenomenon.

The rise of the BSP altered this equilibrium which is why I believe that it represents the most important *political* development in north India since independence. It began as a caste union of state employees i.e. an organization of the emergent Dalit middle class, separated economically from the mass of Dalits but assigned the lowest place in the ranks of the bourgeoisie on the basis of caste. This dichotomy provided the impetus for political organization; and the BSP, through patient and skilful organizational work in its early years, expanded into a party of all Dalits, led and directed by the tiny Dalit middle class (akin economically speaking to the petty bourgeoisie rather than the bourgeoisie proper). Its rise was paralleled by a sudden upsurge of Hindu identity cutting across caste lines amongst upper and middle castes orchestrated around the Ayodhya issue by the extreme right. This spontaneous coalition succeeded in propelling the BJP to power in Uttar Pradesh in the early 1990s; its transience was evident in every subsequent election as the principal castes recomposed themselves around different parties exemplifying their particular identities and social interests within the same broad economic framework. Well before this, however, the old caste coalition of the Congress had been irretrievably broken.

The process began with a double movement – the transfer of Dalit support, always tepid to begin with, to the BSP and the steady intensification of Dalit mobilization by the latter accompanied simultaneously by the shift of Muslim votes to the traditional opposition parties at whose core were the farming castes, a shift born out of anger generated by consistent Congress equivocation over Ayodhya during the 1980s. This was the genesis of the Janta Dal in the late 1980s and its successors, the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and Laloo Yadav's Rashtriya Janta Dal in Bihar. Without Dalit and Muslim support the Congress's chances of winning vanished: to contain the rising tide of Dalit assertion and to maintain their political position, Brahmins and Rajputs largely transferred their votes to the BJP. Once the temporary cross caste mobilization over Ayodhya had subsided, the political landscape rearranged itself. The natural antagonism between farming castes and landless labourers was expressed in the binary opposition

between the SP and the BSP after a short, spectacularly unsuccessful attempt at cohabitation. Muslim votes were divided disproportionately between the two parties. Rajput support after a resting for a while with the BJP is increasingly gravitating towards the party of its traditional social competitors. The BJP itself is shrinking to something like its old core, but augmented by greater Brahmin support and the ideological roots it has been able to sink in sections of some castes. The BJP BSP coalitions were an attempt to revive the old Congress alliance between the apex and the bottom of the caste structure against the pressure of the middle castes. Their failure indicates the uneasiness of both upper and middle castes at Dalit assertion, exemplified in Mayawati's chief ministerial terms. Mulayam Singh's government represents a united front of the rural and urban bourgeoisie, both traditional and emergent, against the Dalit proletariat. Nothing could be more revealing of the conflation of caste and class interests.

In Bihar the simple transfer of Muslim support from the Congress to the party of the main farming caste was enough to propel it to power. In response the upper castes gravitated to the BJP and the Congress virtually vanished from the political landscape. In Gujrat, the binary opposition between the dominant farming caste of Patidars (almost as dominant regionally as the Jats in the north) and Dalit and tribal groups is systematically countered by religious mobilization directed against Muslim – Christian minorities. In Madhya Pradesh, the caste coalition of the Congress appears on the surface capable of being broken up in a manner analogous to UP; a large section of the Dalit vote has shifted to the BSP in Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand. The Rajputs, whose legacy of feudal power has been transferred successfully to the electoral arena everywhere, form the core of the Congress; buttressed by the electoral mobilization of tribal groupings, probably the largest relative to total population in mainland India after Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. A shift in the tribal vote to a distinct identity based party might damage the Congress irreparably but a political formation of this kind is no more than a theoretical possibility. The situation is complicated by the fact that the support of other upper and middle castes is distributed more or less evenly between the Congress and the BJP in different regions and sub-regions. The rapid process of acculturation in tribal areas has been accompanied by organized proselytization; the RSS, which had a tiny core of adivasi support to begin with, is expanding rapidly in targeted areas such as the Nimad region in the western part of the state.

This discrete and impressionistic survey of caste support to the principal bourgeois parties in North India brings us back to the original question. Who actually represents the poor (as opposed to claiming to speak for them and mobilizing them electorally)? Radical economic and political programmes are articulated by splinters of the extreme left, waging armed struggles in large regions throughout north and central India – an arc that sweeps downwards from Bihar and Jharkhand to Bastar, parts of Maharashtra and northern Andhra Pradesh. While these struggles accurately reflect the desperate conditions of the rural proletariat and its capacity for resistance, their economic programmes and political strategies are adapted from different orthodoxies of Marxism rather than being worked out creatively with reference to the increasing complexity of social and production relations in the countryside.

Where then does a party like the BSP fit into this picture? Putting to one side the complex history of the organized left and its successes and failures, does it finally represent the maturation of a mass party that represents at least one section of the rural

proletariat over a large area in the north? Not really and this is the paradox that lies at the heart of the relationship between caste and class. The BSP is the embodiment of the active, authentic participation of Dalits in northern politics for the first time in modern Indian history. But although the BSP represents the social and political assertion of the rural underclass in Uttar Pradesh, it does not represent it in one fundamental way; that is through a coherent and radical economic programme. The two terms of Mayawati's chief ministership were politics as usual albeit with a Dalit bias expressed in largely symbolic gestures – images of Ambedkar, renaming of districts and a Dalit administrative orientation. It can be argued that the conditions in which the party came to power precluded any radical programme but the point is that the BSP consciously operates on the terrain of identity rather than economics. This is because it has been created by a Dalit middle class, integrated economically with the bourgeoisie but socially distinct from it. This accounts for its Janus face, pointing simultaneously in two different directions. This does not invalidate its concrete achievements in social and political terms any more than this analysis from which the organized left is deliberately subtracted invalidates its partial successes.

Through this analysis I've tried to clarify a crucial aspect of the complex relationship between caste and class in India. Caste is class insofar as it determines class position for the overwhelming majority of Indians; but there is a gray area which has to do with class formation within castes and reveals itself as soon as the discussion shifts to the terrain of political mobilization. A tiny middle class has crystallized out of Dalit and adivasi groups that form the core of the proletariat in both town and countryside. A politically active section of this middle class, by virtue of its social prestige, is able to mobilize the community as a whole but this mobilization tends to be particularistic and almost exclusively on the basis of identity. This accounts for the rise of the BSP in the north (although the party in order to widen its appeal has deliberately chosen the semantically wider *bahujan* rather than Dalit); it also explains why the various splinters of the once radical Jharkhand movement now concentrate on reservation policy to the virtual exclusion of economic issues. This is not to say that demands about reservations are unimportant; only that the issue is largely irrelevant to the economic concerns of the mass of adivasi poor whose prospects of obtaining any kind of state employment are nonexistent. A regional platform created by Bhil activists and intellectuals in western India concentrates quite deliberately on propaganda around culture and identity, putting aside economic questions as divisive and of secondary importance. Beyond a certain point identity politics inhibits class mobilization and one doesn't need to go very far to grasp the reason. That section of the middle class vanguard, whether adivasi or Dalit, for whom questions of identity over-ride everything else, speaks for a mass whose economic interests diverge from theirs insofar as they demand a radical restructuring of the entire system. However this middle class has been created precisely through the interstices and channels of the system and this accounts for its dichotomy. At the other end of the scale intensifying class differentiation amongst upper and middle castes is producing a semi proletariat whose size can only be guessed at. Its economic position is rarely as desperate as that of the historic working class because caste privilege and solidarity provide a kind of safety net. This will probably change as economic competition intensifies; but caste assertion largely precludes class solidarity. This is the paradox at the heart of the caste-class relationship. Caste both is and is not class. It is class insofar as it

largely determines class position. It is not class insofar as it inhibits class mobilization within and across castes.

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- ¹ Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks (Orient Longman 1996), pages 147-158.
² Chapter 13 in Isaac Deutscher: Stalin (Pelican Books 1966).
³ See 'May 1968' in Eric Hobsbawm: Revolutionaries (Abacus 1999).
⁴ Irfan Habib: Essays in Indian History (Tulika 1997), page 175
⁵ See Chapter 4 in Breman: Of Peasants, Migrants and Paupers (Oxford 1985)

Glossary:

Congress One of the two major national parties. The dominant party when the country became independent in 1947 by virtue of its leadership of the anti colonial struggle; the party of government in both center and states (India has a federal political structure like the US but with a parliamentary not a presidential system) for most of the 56 years since then. Centrist in political orientation and espousing neo liberal economic policies like the

BJP The Bhartiya Janata Party, a right wing party with a fundamentalist Hindu agenda, the second major pan Indian party, currently in power as the dominant partner of a coalition of more than 20 parties, most of them, apart from the BJP, small formations restricted to particular states. Two of them are

The TDP The Telgu Desam Party which governs the southern state of Andhra Pradesh and

The BJD The Biju Janta Dal which governs the eastern state of Orissa in coalition with the BJP.

BSP The Bahujan Samaj Party, a north Indian party, particularly strong in Uttar Pradesh; essentially a party of north Indian Dalits or Harjans.

Dalits The generic term for various untouchable caste groups who face enormous oppression, both social and economic, particularly in the countryside although caste discrimination in India is technically illegal

Brahmins, Rajputs etc. Caste groups that occupy the apex of the social structure in the north of the country.

Adivasi The Hindi word for tribal societies which inhabit large geographical regions in north India. The word means 'original inhabitant'. Adivasi and Dalit groups occupy the bottom of the social structure and form the bulk of the proletariat, both rural and urban.

Jharkhand A region dominated by tribal communities which saw a radical movement based on adivasi identity, demanding the creation of a adivasi majority state within the country's federal structure. A new state called by the same name was created in 2001.

The Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal Two centre left regional parties in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar respectively.

RSS The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: an extreme right Hindu organization, approximately 80 years old, with branches all over the country. It forms the bedrock of the BJP's support and ideology.

Ayodhya A town in Uttar Pradesh, site of a extended movement by the extreme right to build a temple in place of a mosque. The result has been considerable religious tension and occasional rioting between Hindus and Muslims in different parts of the country.