

Elite Dynamics in a Democratizing State: India, 1947-1984

On 26 June 1975, Indira Gandhi's government imposed a state of Emergency on India. The official reasons behind her government's decision were to thwart threats to its internal security from a populist movement known as the Jaya Prakash (JP) movement, to control unbridled corruption and to combat the high rate of inflation. In order to achieve these aims it suspended citizens' rights to move to the courts on civil liberties' issues. Law enforcement agencies were given powers to detain any individual without any formal warrant. Any gathering of more than four persons in a public place was outlawed. Strict rules of censorship were imposed on the print media. Almost all leaders of the opposition parties and the ruling party known for criticizing Gandhi's government were arrested.

The state of Emergency ended on 18th January 1977. All political prisoners were freed unconditionally. General elections were held within three months. Gandhi's party lost the general election, she resigned and Morarji Desai, the leader of a coalition of opposition parties took oath as the new Prime Minister (Weiner 1978). Interestingly, in the next general election Indira Gandhi returned back to power. To sum up, the Indian democracy got derailed for around eighteen months from its track of democracy during the mid-1970s. But it returned to its track and since then has been moving steadily on it. *Why did the postcolonial Indian state momentarily acquire an authoritarian shape?*

The case of India has received a widespread attention from scholars examining social conditions of the origin of democracy and its sustenance (e.g., Tilly 2007; Przeworski et al 2000; Moore 1993 [1966]). But because of their examination of a vast number of cases across the globe they could not narrow their focus on the brief

authoritarian gap in the history of democracy in postcolonial India. A few scholars of Indian politics have examined the state of Emergency by using the class structure approach (e.g., Kaviraj 1986; Kochanek 1976) or the social psychological approach (e.g., Nandy 1980) or the psychological approach (e.g., Hart 1976). Class structuralists used various conceptions of the then dominant classes in India as their unit of analysis. Social psychologists used Indira Gandhi's personality along with her popularity among the middle classes as their unit of analysis, and psychologists used traits of authoritarianism in Indira Gandhi's personality as their unit of analysis. I have elsewhere discussed in detail the respective weaknesses of these three approaches.¹ To briefly summarize them; upon empirical examination of their respective units of analysis I noted that there were hardly any significant changes in them before, during and after the state of Emergency to be considered as a plausible cause for its appearance.

I argue that in order to understand the only period of authoritarianism in India, so far, we need to locate it in the history of changes within the world of postcolonial Indian politics. Recent work in historical sociology has demonstrated that changes in networks and cultures of political elites plays a significant role in changes in the shape of state (see McLean 2004; Adams 1994; Padgett and Ansell 1993). Following their insight, I will examine changes in the networks and cultural experiences of 3,895 (3,336) political elites of India elected to the Indian parliament between 1947 and 1984 to illustrate reasons behind the appearance of the state of Emergency.²

¹ My criticism of the available studies on the state of Emergency in postcolonial India is a part of a chapter in my dissertation (in progress).

² Numbers outside parenthesis represent the total number of elected parliamentarians. Numbers in parenthesis represent the total number of parliamentarians whose data is available and has been used in this project.

The period from 1947 to 1967 in the Indian history is referred to as the Nehruvian era in politics. During this period the Congress party controlled the national government and all the regional governments. Four parliamentary sessions were held during this period: the 1952-57, 1957-62, 1962-67 and 1967-71 session. During these four sessions 2,220 (1,843) political leaders were elected to the parliament. The next seventeen years of Indian history, from 1967 to 1984, are recognized as the Indira Gandhi's era in politics. During her era the Congress party controlled the national government and most of the regional governments except for a three years hiatus, from 1977 to 1980, when the Janta party had a majority in the parliament. Three parliamentary sessions were held during the Gandhian era: the 1971-77, 1977-80 and 1980-84 session. During these three sessions 1,675 (1,523) political leaders were elected to the parliament.

The main argument of my paper is that the 1971-77 session, the session during which the state of Emergency was imposed, was a turning point in the history of postcolonial politics in India. After the 1971-77 session parliamentarians of all parties exhibited sharp changes in their network structures and cultural experiences. When we specifically examine the 1971-77 session we would note that the Congress parliamentarians were a group of tightly knit, culturally suave but politically immature political elites who were distant from the masses unlike any of their predecessors. On the other hand, the opposition parliamentarians were a dispersed group of culturally suave and politically mature elites who were close to the masses like never before. These changes in the features of the world of political elites during the 1971-77 session, changes that forebode the future of politics in India, created the macro structural and cultural conditions for the rise of the state of Emergency in the late 1970's.

I will illustrate changes in networks and cultural experiences of the Nehruvian and the Gandhian era's parliamentarians by examining their biographical data recorded in Who's Who of the Indian parliament. Who's Who of the Indian Parliament, an Indian government publication gives detail of each parliament session's members' education (schools, colleges, universities), profession (e.g., agriculturist, industrialist, teacher, doctor, lawyer etc.), years spent in their respective party's various levels of offices (local, regional or the national level), years spent in any regional legislature and the national parliament, years spent in the regional and national ministerial offices (e.g., number of the regional/national Ministries held, years spent in the Ministerial offices, member of a regional/national state's office's committee etc.), participation in the local political mobilization and important political conferences (e.g., movement for the entry of low-caste members in a Hindu temple, participation in a conference on youth movements, etc.), membership in various clubs (e.g., professional associations, recreational clubs, etc.), hobbies (e.g., reading, shooting, etc.) and publications (e.g., political pamphlets, literary work, etc.). In the next few pages I will discuss concepts of network analysis and culture relevant to my project, followed by a detailed discussion on findings on changes in networks and cultural experiences of the Nehruvian and Gandhian era's parliamentarians.

Two Concepts of Network Analysis: Affiliation Networks and Cohesion

Measurement

The basic thesis of network analysis is that relations among actors or collectivities, and not their internal essences, shape their respective practices (Emirbayer 1997; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). Network analysis is typically based on networks of

relations among actors, or 1-mode networks. But often, the network data available in the real world depict relations between actors and social groups such as clubs or political parties, or events such as meetings and conferences. The network of relations between actors and social groups or events is conceptualized as a 2-mode network or affiliation network (for details see Wasserman and Faust 2006 [1994]; Breiger 2003; Borgatti and Everett 1997). Examination of an affiliation network can provide some interesting insights into behavior of actors in it (for e.g., see Stokman, Zeigler and Scott 1985; McPherson 1982). But most of the network measures, including the cohesion measure, are based on 1-mode networks. In order to take measurement of cohesion from an affiliation network it is first converted into a 1-mode network.

A cohesive network, to put it simply, refers to network of ties among actors who are frequently in interaction with each other (Nooy et al 2007 [2005], pp. 61; Wasserman and Faust 2006 [1994], pp. 249). We can measure tightness of relations among cohesive actors in a network by counting their average number of ties. The average number of ties of actors in a network is directly proportional to the cohesion of their network. As their average number of ties increases, cohesion of their network increases, and as the average number of their ties decreases, cohesion of their network decreases (Nooy et al 2007 [2005], pp. 63-64).

In order to examine changes in the cohesion of parliamentarians' networks, I will first develop their affiliation networks. Next, I will convert their affiliation networks into 1-mode networks of their political and social ties. I identified parliamentarians' affiliations with the parliamentary committees, Union ministries, national level party offices, trade unions, and their previous association with other parties as the significant

sources of their political ties. I identified parliamentarians' affiliations with various social clubs and educational institutes as the relevant sources of their social ties.

In addition to examining parliamentarians' political and social ties with each other, I have also measured their ties with people in everyday life. I have categorized their ties with people in everyday life under the label called social engagements. I measured parliamentarians' everyday life social engagements by counting their activities in non-political groups such as neighborhood societies, community associations, university or college committees and so on.

Two Cultures of Politics in Early Postcolonial India: Factional politics and Organizational politics

I have grouped political actors' practices to win various offices in state and or in the party into two ideal typical modes of practicing politics- factional politics and organizational politics. Factional politics refers to political actors' various practices to win village and district level offices of state and party. A faction was comprised of a village's patron and his clients (Nicholas 1977, pp. 57; Brass 1965, 1995 [1990], pp. 96-97; Weiner 1967, pp. 134). A faction leader's political practices were shaped by two constraints. He had to ensure that his faction's members remained loyal to him and, at the same time, he needed to engineer splits in his rival factions. In order to achieve these aims a faction's leader needed to control and distribute state and party sponsored resources among his clients (Brass 1995 [1990], pp. 109-110). He would have been able to access requisite resources only when he was elected to local village/district level offices of either state or party. All processes initiated by a faction's leader to mobilize masses in a village to get elected to village and district level offices gave rise to a set of

institutions, practices, and styles of practicing politics that I call the ideal-typical logic of *factional politics*. In this project, I will measure parliamentarians' experience of culture of factional politics by measuring changes in the average number of their engagement with various offices of state and party at village and district level.

Organizational politics refers to a ruling party's politician's various practices to get elected to either a state's ministerial office or a significant post in the party. A ruling party of a region was usually divided into two wings a) the legislative wing that consisted of the party's ruling faction's members who were ministers in the region's government, as well as supporters of the ruling faction who were only ordinary members of the assembly; and b) the organization wing that was consisted of all members of the party's ruling faction's rival factions, most of whom usually were the party's ordinary workers, office holders in the party and party's ordinary members in the assembly (Weiner 1967, pp. 42; Kochanek 1968, pp. 233, 244).

A Chief Minister was dependent on the organization wing's members to maintain enough support in the assembly to remain in control of the regional government. He solicited support of the organization wing's members by promising them easy access to state's offices' resources and/or promising to absorb some of their members in any future adjustment in his council of ministers. Furthermore, he also used these strategies to exploit any weak tie among organization wing's members to cause a split among them and absorb the break away group or a leader in the legislative wing.

A typical strategy used by an organization wing's leader to gain some degree of authority over legislative wing's members was to get organization wing's members elected to various offices of the party. Their access to the party offices gave them control

over party's nominees for the region's districts, assembly, and parliament seats. Furthermore, an organization wing's leader used his control over the party's offices to tempt members of the legislative wing by promising them ministerial offices in a future government. However, a leader whether belonging to the legislative wing or the organization wing needed to shape his practices in such a manner that he could simultaneously keep his faction intact and break his rival leaders' factions, but without threatening the unity of the party. Such political practices of a leader to win either a regional level ministerial office or a regional level party office comprised of the ideal typical logics of *organizational politics*.

A party's leaders used the ideal typical logic of organizational politics to reach a national level state's office. However, there were few differences between the use of the logic of organizational politics at the regional and the national levels. A political leader needed to get elected to the parliament, not an assembly, in order to become an eligible candidate to compete for one of the central government's ministries. A related difference was that the counterpart of the legislative wing of a regional unit of a party at the national unit of the party was called the parliamentary wing. In this project I will measure parliamentarians' experience of culture of organization politics by measuring changes in the average number of their engagement with various offices of state and party at regional and national level.

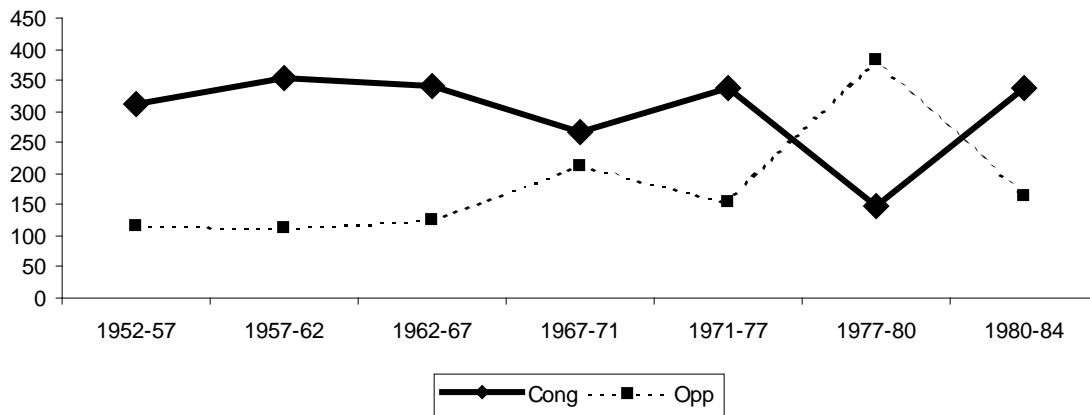
In addition to measuring parliamentarians' political experiences, I will also measure their everyday life cultural experiences. I will measure parliamentarians' cultural experiences by noting changes in their engagement with performing arts (music, painting,

theater, etc.), literary activities (their published fictional and non-fictional writings), and editorial offices of newspapers and magazines.

Changes in the World of Postcolonial Indian Politics (1947-84)

Nearly a century old era of British colonialism in India ended in the year 1947. The postcolonial Indian state adopted institutions and the ethos of a modern liberal democracy. Every citizen had the right to vote during the general elections, held every five years, to elect their representatives for the national parliament. The party that won at least two-thirds of the seats in the parliament became eligible to claim rights over the central government. The winning party's members nominated one of its parliament members to the office of Prime Minister. Next, the chosen Prime Minister nominated a few members of his party, elected to the parliament, to ministerial offices of the central government.

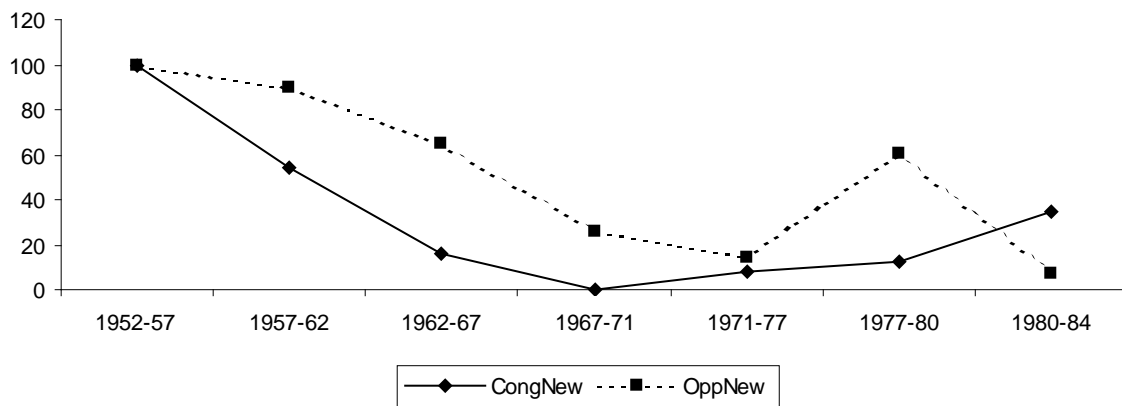
Graph 1: Number of Congress and Opposition Parliamentarians (1952-84)



The first general election for the parliament was held in 1952. Since then, elections for selecting a new parliament has been regularly held, with few exceptions, every five years. Graph 1 depicts the total number of the Congress (Cong) and opposition parliamentarians (Opp) elected for each parliamentary session held during the Nehruvian

(1952-71) and Gandhian era (1971-84). From the graph we can see why India was described as a one party democracy for the first two postcolonial decades. Congress party always had more than the minimum number of parliamentarians required to control the central government. It quickly gained the reputation as the only ruling party of India. It lived up to its reputation in the first parliamentary session of the Gandhian era. Since then, however, things took a downturn for the Congress party. The first parliamentary session of the Gandhian era was slated to end in 1976. However, in 1975 the Indira Gandhi's government imposed the state of Emergency. The state of Emergency lasted for nearly two years, from 1975 to 1977. In the first post-Emergency election Congress party lost majority in the parliament. It regained a majority in the election for the 1980-84 parliamentary session. But by then a serious dent had been made on Congress party's reputation as the only ruling party of India. Furthermore, India could no longer be described as a one party democracy without any serious qualifications.

Graph 2: Changes in the Percentage of New Parliamentarians in Congress Party and Opposition Parties (1952-84)

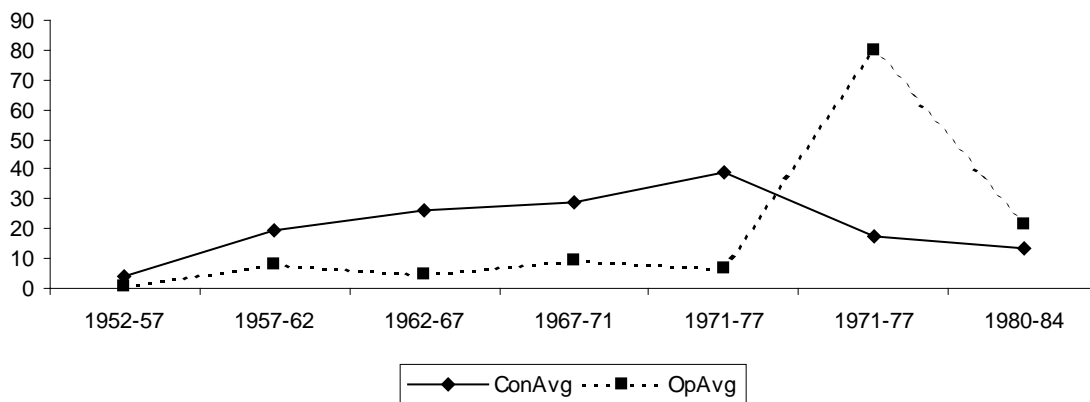


Beginning of the end of the one party democracy and change in the reputation of Congress party were few of the new conspicuous features of postcolonial Indian politics. But less conspicuous and deeper changes were also taking place in it. One of the most

significant changes was an increase in the entry of new parliamentarians. Graph 2 shows changes in the number of the new comers among the Congress (CongNew) and opposition parliamentarians (OppNew). We would note that during the Nehruvian era there was a steady decrease of the new comers in the Congress party. This trend was reversed during the Gandhian era. Many Congress leaders were elected to the parliament for the first time at the beginning of the Gandhian era. Congress party lost the next election, and won the following one. But in spite of changes in its electoral fortunes the trend of increase in new parliamentarians in it continued unabated.

As far as the opposition parties are concerned there was a steady decline in the number of new parliamentarians among them during the Nehruvian era. Their numbers were least at the beginning of the Gandhian era. However, there was a large influx of them in the first parliamentary session held after the end of the state of Emergency. But their increase did not become a trend. In the next session there was a dramatic decrease in their numbers among the opposition parliamentarians.

Graph 3: Changes in the Average Number of Political Ties of Congress and Opposition Parliamentarians (1952-84)

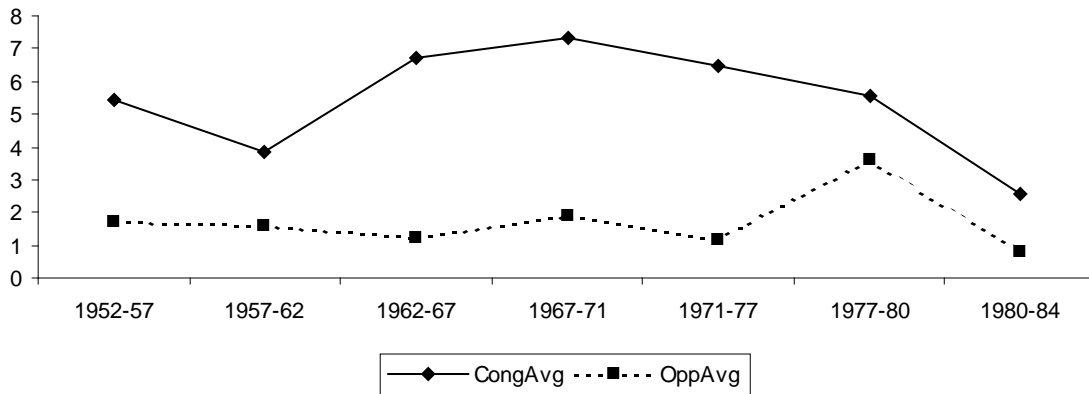


Graph 3 depicts changes in the average number of political ties of Congress and opposition parliamentarians. We can note that as the Nehruvian era progressed there was

a steady increase in Congress parliamentarians' average number of political ties. It reached the highest point in the first session of the Gandhian era. But it later steadily decreased. The opposition parliamentarians' average number of political ties during the Nehruvian era was lower than that of the Congress parliamentarians. In the first session of the Gandhian era it remained nearly same as it was during the previous sessions of the Nehruvian era. During the Gandhian era first there was a steep increase in it followed by an equally steep decrease. But at its end opposition parliamentarians' average numbers of political ties were higher than ever before. In fact, it was even higher than that of the Congress parliamentarians.

When we recall discussion on the cohesion measurement we would note that the average number of ties of actors in a network is directly proportional to the cohesion of their network. Hence, we could say that the political networks of the Congress parliamentarians steadily became more cohesive during the Nehruvian era. They were most cohesive in the first session of the Gandhian era. They then steadily began losing cohesiveness as the Gandhian era progressed. Cohesion of opposition parliamentarians' political networks remained relatively stable during the Nehruvian era. During the first session it was nearly same as it had been in the previous sessions of the Nehruvian era. It went through high fluctuations during the Gandhian era. But at its end it was higher than ever before in the two eras.

Graph 4: Changes in the Average number of Social Ties of Congress and Opposition Parliamentarians (1952-84)

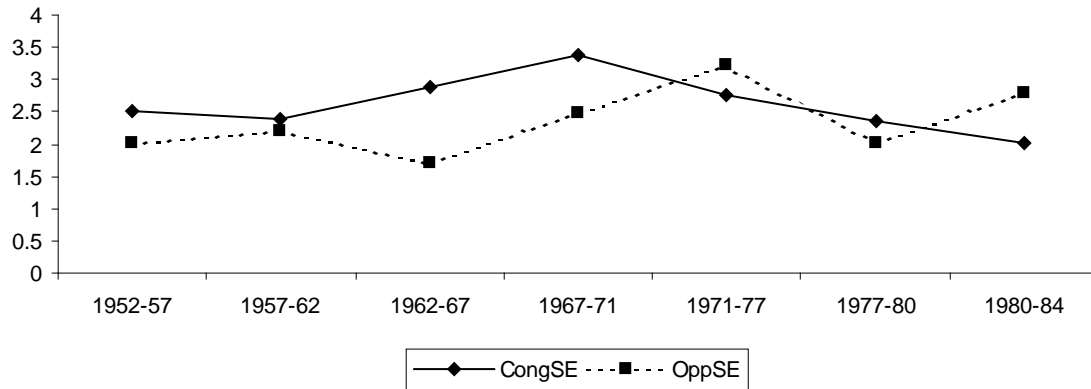


Graph 4 depicts changes in the average number of social ties of Congress and opposition parliamentarians. We can note that except for the period between the first two sessions, the social ties of Congress parliamentarians steadily increased during the Nehruvian era. This trend reversed during the first session of the Gandhian era and reached its lowest point at the end of it. We can say that as the Nehruvian era progressed there was an increase in the cohesion of the Congress parliamentarians' social networks. At the first session of the Gandhian era it was lower than the last session of the Nehruvian era. But it later steadily decreased as the Gandhian era progressed.

Opposition parliamentarians always had lower social ties than the Congress parliamentarians. Their average number of social ties fluctuated during both eras. At the first session of the Gandhian era their average number of social ties were at a lower point. It reached the crest point of the two sessions during the second session of the Gandhian era, and turf point at the end of the Gandhian era. In terms of cohesion measurement we can say that the cohesion of opposition parliamentarians' social networks went through fluctuations during both eras. It was at a high point at the end of the Nehruvian era, and at

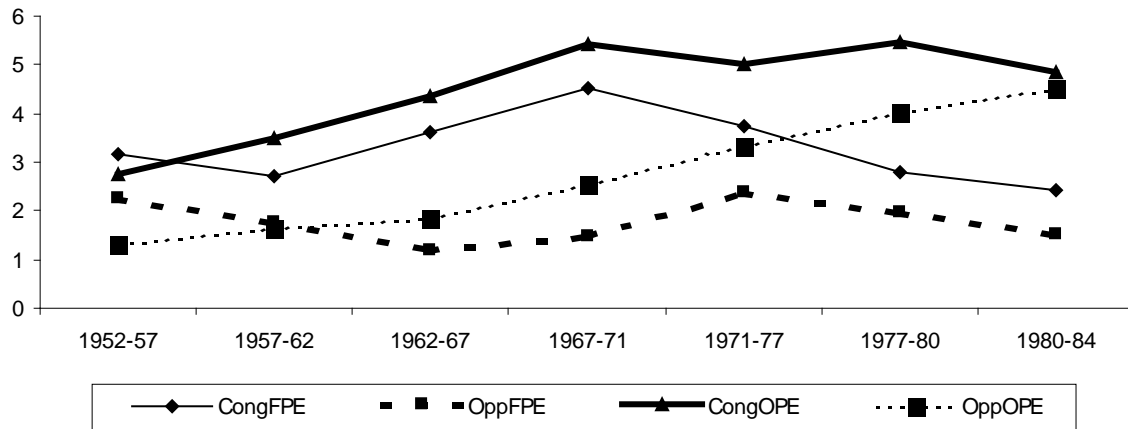
a low point during the first session of the Gandhian era. But in the two eras it was highest during the middle of the Gandhian era and lowest at its end.

Graph 5: Changes in Social Engagement of Congress and Opposition Parliamentarians (1952-84)



The x-axis of graph 5 depicts parliamentarians' average number of social engagements with non-political groups such as neighborhood societies, community groups, college and university committees and so on. We can note that during the Nehruvian era there was a steady increase in Congress parliamentarians' social engagements (CongSE). It reached a high point at the end of the Nehruvian era. At the first session of the Gandhian era it was lower than the last session of the Nehruvian era. During the Gandhian era it steadily decreased reaching the lowest point ever in the two eras at its end. There was quite a fluctuation in opposition parliamentarians' social engagements (OppSE) between the first and the third session of the Nehruvian era. It began to steadily increase from the third session onward. It reached the highest point at the first session of the Gandhian era. Overall, during the Gandhian era it remained higher than what it was during the Nehruvian era.

Graph 6: Changes in Political Experiences of Congress and Opposition Parliamentarians (1952-84)



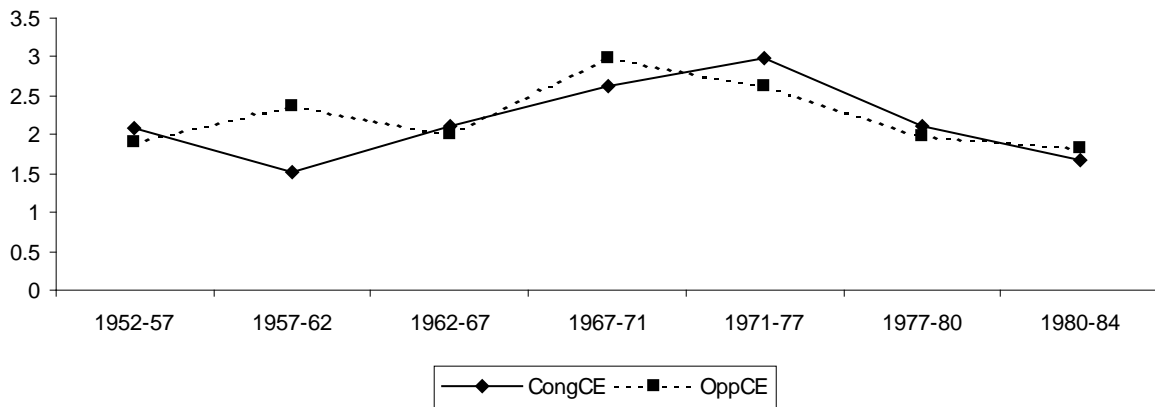
Changes in the composition of parliamentarians were also reflected in the kind of political experiences they brought with them in the world of postcolonial politics. The x-axis of graph 6 depicts parliamentarians' average number of engagements with the state and party offices at the village and district level (measure of their factional politics experience), and regional and national level (measure of their organizational politics experience). We would note that except for the period between the first two sessions of the Nehruvian era there was a steady increase in Congress parliamentarians' experience of factional politics (CongFPE). Their experience of it reached the peak point at the end of the Nehruvian era. This trend began to reverse during the Gandhian era. In the first session of the Gandhian era the Congress parliamentarians had lower experiences of factional politics than their colleagues during the last session of the Nehruvian era. Their experiences of factional politics began to steadily decrease reaching its nadir at the end of the Gandhian era.

When we examine trends in the Congress parliamentarians' organizational politics experiences (CongOPE) we would note that there was a steady increase in their experience of it during the Nehruvian era. Their experience of it reached the highest point

at the end of the Nehruvian era. But it decreased in the first session of the Gandhian era. This decrease, however, could not become a trend. In the next session it increased, followed by a decrease. Overall, during the Gandhian era the Congress parliamentarians' experience of the organizational politics remained nearly the same as it were near the end of the Nehruvian era.

When we look at the trends in the opposition parliamentarians' experience of factional politics (OppFPE) we would notice that overall it was much lower than that of the Congress parliamentarians. Furthermore, there was a steady decline in their experience of it during the first three sessions of the Nehruvian era. There was an increase in their factional politics experience from the third session of the Nehruvian era. It reached the highest point in the first session of the Gandhian era. However, since the second session of the Gandhian era the opposition parliamentarians joined the trend of the Congress parliamentarians' decreasing experience of the factional politics. Opposition parliamentarians' experience of the organizational politics (OppFPE) remained significantly lower than that of the Congress parliamentarians during the Nehruvian era. However, there was a steady increase in their experiences during the two eras. During the first session of the Gandhian era it was higher than in any previous sessions of the Nehruvian era. It became nearly equal to the Congress parliamentarians' experience of it near the end of the Gandhian era.

Graph 7: Changes in Cultural Experiences of Congress and Opposition Parliamentarians (1952-84)



The x-axis of graph 7 depicts parliamentarians' average number of cultural experiences i.e., their average number of engagement with performing arts (music, painting, theater, etc.), literary activities (their published fictional and non-fictional writings), and editorial offices of newspapers and magazines. We would note that except for the period between the first two sessions of the Nehruvian era, there was a steady increase in Congress parliamentarians' cultural experience (CongCE). It reached the highest point at the first session of the Gandhian era. However, it steadily decreased during the Gandhian era, reaching the lowest point at its end. There was a wide fluctuation in opposition parliamentarians' cultural experience (OppCE) during the Nehruvian era. However, near its end they had relatively higher cultural experiences than at its beginning. During the first session of the Gandhian era it was lower than the last session of the Nehruvian era. But it steadily declined during the Gandhian era, reaching its lowest point at its end.

Discussion and Conclusion

My examination of 3,336 political elites elected to the parliament between 1952 and 1984 shows that the 1971-77 parliamentary session, the session during which the

state of Emergency was imposed, was a watershed moment in the history of postcolonial Indian politics. After the 1971-77 session there was an unprecedented increase in the number of new comers among Congress parliamentarians. They became both politically and socially distant from each other, and less engaged with social activities of the everyday life. Their political experiences were relatively poor when compared to that of their predecessors. While their experiences of organizational politics did not grow at all, their experiences of factional politics steadily decreased. And while these changes took place they became less and less engaged with cultural activities.

As far as the opposition parties were concerned, after the 1971-77 session the number of incumbents among them continued to remain high. They became politically closer, but socially distant from each other. Though there were some fluctuations in their social activities, it remained considerably high. When we closely examine their political experiences we would note that their experience of the organizational politics had increased. However, their experience of factional politics had steadily decreased. Furthermore, their cultural experience too steadily decreased.

When we specifically examine the composition of all parties' parliamentarians in the 1971-77 session we would not be too surprised if something extraordinary happened during its tenure. Most of the Congress parliamentarians were a politically tight but socially loose group of politically immature elites, with few political neophytes, who were socially disengaged, but highly cultured and distant from the masses. On the other hand, the opposition parties had a very large number of politically matured parliamentarians. They were politically and socially loose group of political elites who

were socially engaged, cultured, and closer to the masses than their predecessors. And something extraordinary did happen during the 1971-77 session: the state of Emergency.

I have so far tried to make the point that changes in the cultural and structural dimensions of the world of postcolonial Indian politics from the Nehruvian to Gandhian era tipped the Indian state on the path towards authoritarianism. But proclivity of the Indian state towards democracy turned out to be surprisingly tenacious. It very soon bounced back on the tracks of liberal democracy. Here it is important to remember that scholarship on Indian democracy did not project a very optimistic future for it (e.g., see Moore 1993 [1996]). After all, when compared to other established democracies it had a large degree of heterogeneity among its masses in social, cultural and economic terms. I propose that to understand why democracy in India survived through its most dangerous period, the period of the state of Emergency, we need to examine the history of the world of its super elites i.e., those political elites who were not only parliamentarians but also held powerful offices of the state and party during the Nehruvian and Gandhian era.

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