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Corruption in the Indian Political System

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Corruption in the Indian Political System

By

Khusboo Desai

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ABSTRACT

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Currently, India and China are both competing to be the hegemonic power in Asia as well as a superpower internationally. Both are growing at double-digit rates, while other nations are dealing with the current recession. However, while China is reducing corruption which ultimately translates into money lost by the government, corruption in India is increasing at a rapid pace¹. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2010, India ranked 87 out of 180 nations. Though, India ranked better than half the other nations, India fell from 72nd (2007) to 84th in two years. In my thesis, I explore the relationship between voters and politicians in order to understand why corruption dominates the political system and why voters tolerate corruption by electing known corrupt leaders to office. I conducted a village study in Gujarat, interviewed local politicians and party leaders, and organized focus groups with women and lower castes. My findings indicate that corruption cannot easily be explained without understanding the systems that perpetuate it - the story of corruption in India encompasses centuries of caste dominance, the role of campaign finance and systems of political patronage.

¹ In 2007, both China and India ranked 72nd on the Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perception Index. Since then, both countries have decreased in ranks; In 2010, China came in at 78th and India at 87th. It is crucial to note that from the 2009 rankings, China improved (going from 79th to 78th), while India declined from (87th to 89th). Though the improvement is small it suggests some progress and China is ten spots ahead of India (China, India Middle of the Pack in New World Corruption Index 2010). Since the corruption crackdown initiated by President Hu Jintao many high-ranking officials have been removed from their positions and given severe punishments. For example, the former heads of a Chinese government agency and Chinese banks were executed for accepting bribes and embezzling money. Others were sentenced to life in prison or had to millions in fines (Gross et al. 2008: 2).

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Introduction

India marked the opening of the Commonwealth Games with a hundred million dollar ceremony in a stadium filled with a cheering crowd of 65,000; India dazzled the world with its 500 ton stage, 7,000 dancers, a giant hot-air blimp, and a star performance by Academy Award winner AR Rehman. Newspapers from around the world deemed the Games as 'India's Great Spectacle' and announced that 'India has arrived' (Burke 2010). The ceremony not only highlighted India's abilities to the world, but it also quelled the worries of Game organizers and the Indian public who were inundated with images and news of substandard construction, poor conditions of the athlete's village, and disease breakouts (Betigeri 2010). Within a month those worries were dispelled and athletes, dignitaries, and tourists encountered a new face of India—one that promoted a clean image, one that was filled with a state-of-the-art metro system, airport, and infrastructure, and one that officially introduced India as an emerging power.

Yet beneath the glossy exterior of the spectacle lay alarming allegations of corruption. The \$2.5 billion sports event was supposed to be India's answer to China's phenomenal display at the 2008 Summer Olympics and showcase its immense economical growth and influence, but the glaring corruption and controversy dampened India's standing and stature in the global arena.

An initial report by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), an anti-corruption agency found numerous gross violations of accepted protocols. Corruption infractions included contracts given at higher prices, it was even found that contractors who received a job in an auction were allowed to later manipulate and alter figures to increase profit earnings, contracts

given to ineligible agencies, and under-the-table financial schemes by CWG board members. The aides of Suresh Kalmadi, the Chairman of the Games, such as TS Darbani, Sanjay Mahendroo, and Jayachandran were removed from the Organizing Committee after numerous allegations of financial misappropriation. Prior to their removal, Anil Khanna, the treasurer of the CWG Organizing Committee, was forced to resign after it was uncovered that he illegally gave contracts to his son's firm. Overall, the CVC concluded that sixteen individual CWG projects were marked with serious procedural violations that totaled to a Rs. 2,000 crore (about \$430,000,000) loss to the government (Corruption scandal hits 2010 Games, organisers deny charges 2010).

The corruption controversy surrounding the Games raises the question of how corruption continues to occur at such high rates in India despite high growth and a growing global stature.

A History of Corruption

Corruption has historically been rampant within India's political system. In 1992, Harshad Mehta and a few stockbrokers were accused of using bank funds for trading stocks. Altogether, the accused stole over \$778 million and as news broke of the scandal, the prices of shares fell drastically leading to investors losing millions of dollars. Further investigations into the scandal revealed a plot that involved top officers in banks and numerous politicians and statesmen. Unfortunately, Mehta was only convicted in one case filed against him and several executives were condemned for fraud, but most of the politicians returned to the public arena unscathed.

Almost twenty years later, corruption still appears to be a big if not larger problem than it previously was. The year 2010 was plagued with one scandal after the next such as the aforementioned Common Wealth Games, telecoms license issue, Adarsh housing scam, and Public Distribution System (PDS) Scandal.

In the 2G telecoms scam, the Telecoms Minister Andimuthu Raja was accused of selling licenses and spectrum bandwidths below the market price. Moreover, numerous agencies were able to acquire licenses even though they were ineligible; for example, Swan Telecoms acquired a license though they were restricted due to monopoly problems and Unitech was able to get a license with insufficient capital. The scandal cost the Indian government \$39 billion in revenue, yet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hesitated in indicting Raja with corruption charges (Seven big corruption scandals that rocked India 2010). Within months of the Telecom Scam, came news of the Public Distribution System Scandal. Gegong Apang, the former Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh and a senior Congress bureaucrat, was brought on charges of corruption and fraud. He was accused of stealing money from PDS by forging false subsidy bills and records. The Central Bureau of Investigation places losses at 1000 crore rupees (approximately \$220,000,000) (Talukdar 2010). Then late in 2010, reports of illegal activity by Mumbai Chief Minister Ashok Chavan came to light. In the Adarsh Housing Scam, top politicians of the Congress Party and bureaucrats illegally sold apartments that were supposed to be given to war widows. The apartment building, which was located in a prime real estate spot in Mumbai, was sold for only \$130,000 to party family members when they were actually appraised for \$1.8 million (Seven big corruption scandals that rocked India 2010).

Raja resigned from his position and CM Chavan was removed from office, but removal of corrupt figures in Indian politics has been proven to be an exception and not the norm. Prominent figures such as Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati, Narsimha Rao, and Rajiv Gandhi have been implicated and tried for high profile corruption scandals yet they continue to rule India's political scene. Lalu Prasad Yadav is known for the infamous Fodder scam in which he siphoned off over \$40 million from the Animal Husbandry Department. Yet, while he was in jail his wife took over the political reigns, he escaped charges, and now is a Member of Parliament in the Lok Sabha, akin to House of Representatives. Mayawati is a Dalit (low caste) leader and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India in terms of population. She is publicly known to have illegally acquired millions of dollars in assets, yet she is an unbeatable politician. Narsimha Rao was implicated in a vote-for-cash scandal in 1993 and was formally convicted in a criminal case. And most notable is Rajiv Gandhi and his political dynasty. In the 1980s, the Bofor Scandal rocked India and it was found that defense companies were illegally given contracts in exchange for kick-backs. Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, allegedly made \$2 billion in kickbacks, but in today's popular culture of India, he is ironically dubbed "Mr. Clean" for his pure non-corrupt conduct.

Corruption and Bribery by Numbers

Corruption is a growing concern for India. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2010, India ranked 87 out of 180 nations. Though, India ranked better than half the other nations, there are significant implications of this ranking. First, India fell from 72nd (2007) to 84th in two years, then to 87th, primarily stemming from the CWG

corruption allegations; secondly, the increase in corruption can negatively impact its growth (India drops to 87th rank in Integrity Index 2010).

Conservative estimates by Global Financial Integrity, a Washington-based company, last month released figures that corruption resulted in an illicit outflow of \$125 billion dollars between 2000 and 2008. They attributed this problem to political and corporate officers who tap funds from government programs (intended to help the poor and tribal communities of India) and transfer those funds to political and corporate elite (Jha 2010). Transparency International reckons that corruption cost the Indian taxpayer about seven billion dollars in 2004, with most of the money lost due to bribery (Corruption costs Indian taxpayers 7000 million dollars 2004).

Bribery is described by Transparency International as an interaction that involves two parties: a donor, who offers a bribe, and an acceptor. The act of public figures accepting bribes reflects a system of abuse where power is misused to acquire personal benefits. In the 2008 Bribe Payers Index Report, India was ranked 19 out of 22 countries², indicating a greater tendency to indulge in bribery. The report also found that companies from India along with China, Mexico, and Russia were most likely to engage in the three types of bribery: (1) bribing high-ranked politicians and parties, (2) bribing low-ranked public officials, and (3) using personal relationships to acquire public government contracts (Bribery Payers Index 2008).

Bribery is also commonly practiced at the individual level. According to the Global Corruption Barometer 2007, about a quarter of respondents admitted to using bribery to gain

² Countries in the study include: Belgium, Canada, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Singapore, United States, Spain, Hong Kong, South Africa, Taiwan, Brazil, Italy, India, Mexico, China, and Russia.

access to basic services (Chene 2009: 2). Another corruption survey conducted by Transparency International-India and the Centre for Media Studies had similar results; about one-third of households below the poverty line have used bribery to gain access to public services that they were already entitled to and fifty percent of people have disclosed firsthand experiences of using bribes to gain influence in a public office (Chene 2009: 3). Furthermore, recent reports on bribery demands in India noted that 96 anonymous claims of bribery demands were filed within a year (Jul 07 – Oct 08) on the Business Registry for International Bribes and Extortion. Over 91% of the demanded bribes were asked for by government officials and of the total bribes, almost (77%) were given to avoid harm than acquiring an advantage (Chene 2009: 3-4).

Public Views on Corruption

Common dialogue among the public concerning Indian politics is littered with phrases such as ‘All politicians of India are corrupted’ reflects public sentiment concerning corruption in India (All politicians corrupted: Media reveals the truth 2010). A survey conducted by Outlook found that 23.1 percent of people believe that corrupt politicians are continually elected because everyone is corrupt, while 39.9 and 21.4 percent of respondents chose no other option and the difficulty of honest candidates to prevail against strong powerful corrupt candidates, respectively. The third choice acknowledges the presence of honest uncorrupt candidates in the system, but they do not have the means to get elected into office.

The public implicates greed and numerous opportunities to collect bribes and illegal funds as the major cause of the increasing corruption in India. However, most also agree that courts and anti-corruption agencies have been largely unsuccessful in curbing corruption (One

in two Indians vote for the corrupt 2009). Echoing public sentiment, the 2007 World Bank Governance report and Freedom House 2008 indicate that corruption has been increasing and not curbed in recent years (Chene 2009: 2). India performs about average in terms of voice and accountability and government effectiveness, but it fails in regulating and controlling corruption. Global Corruption Barometer 2007 Report found that most Indians approached the idea of corruption regulation with much cynicism; 90 percent of respondents indicated that they thought that corruption would increase and 68 percent regarded efforts by the government to thwart corruption as inefficient and ineffective (Chene 2009: 3).

Corruption has been a source of frustration among the public, but interestingly, it was found that one in two voters knowingly vote for a known corrupt politician (One in two Indians vote for the corrupt 2009). This prompts the question as to why voters continue to vote for corrupt politicians. The exhibited behavior appears counterintuitive and counterproductive.

Literature Review

In the current literature, most scholars have attributed the source of corruption in the Indian political system to the culture, bureaucratic administration, and caste.

A theory by Hauk and Saez-Marti suggests that the presence and absence of corruption can be explained by culture. The theory asserts that values and beliefs can be thought of as a slow-moving element of culture because they are passed to each subsequent generation relatively unchanged. Ultimately, these unchanged values and beliefs affect the adherence to social norms, reflect the belief in the values fundamental to the social norm, and indicates the probability that a norm will be institutionalized in subsequent future generations. Essentially, the theory contends that in certain cultures, anti-corruption social norms have not been institutionalized by individuals therefore, their motivation to indulge or not in corrupt activities is weak. It is expected that individuals raised in such societies and cultures in which corruption is rampant will be more likely to engage in corrupt activities compared to individuals raised in societies and cultures where corruption is rare and anti-corruption social norms have been internalized (Barr and Serra 2008: 2-3).

Similar to the theory proposed by Hauk and Saez-Marti, Moreno also asserts that corruption has a cultural component and each culture and society has differing levels and allowance of corruption, which he terms "corruption permissiveness." However, where he differs from Hauk and Saez-Marti is that he does not attribute corruption solely to culture. Moreno suggests that in newly democratic societies, corruption is often seen as a vestigial characteristic of practices from old authoritarian governments. Corruption becomes entrenched in the expectation of the constituents (Moreno 2003: 497).

The theory has been subject to much criticism. Studies by Rose-Ackerman find that people are exasperated with corruption and toleration of corrupt practices is a result of

resignation and fear not cultural permissiveness (Widmalm 2005: 767). Furthermore, Widmalm argues that the theory is prone to circular logic because it is alleged that in societies in which corruption is rampant, it is culturally accepted and the evidence of the cultural acceptance and permissiveness is the existence of corruption itself (Widmalm 2005: 768).

Widespread corruption in the Indian political system has often been attributed to the administrative labyrinth—bureaucracy. India's colonization by the British was marked by a stark shift in the political systems from princely rule to a deeply rooted pervasive administration system. The British bureaucratic system was designed in the mid-19th century to serve the colonial interest of the British Empire and it separated the people from the government (Sodhi 2000: 11).

The Indian public sector today is one of the largest in the world. The central Indian government employs roughly three million people and the states employ an additional 7 million. These ten million are employed by the state to be police officers, ticket collectors for one of the largest railway systems in the world, and peons at an office. A small portion or about five thousand people are part of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) (India's civil service: Battling the babu raj 2008).

The current IAS is the product of the British's enforcing structure: the Indian Civil Service (ICS). After India was occupied completely by the East India Company, the British Civil Service entered India to strengthen Britain's colonial rule and implement law and order. The British government opened positions in the Civil Service and started to recruit officers based on merit. By 1892, out of the 992 officers in the Civil Service, 21 were Indian (Ahmed 2009: 15). Then in

1922, the British government officially created the Indian Civil Service with the primary intention of solidifying the colonial regime (Ahmed 2009: 18).

The administration and bureaucracy was further institutionalized by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, to implement development and reforms. In the Nehru period, the bureaucratic administration grew in its size and power and was given the sole responsibility of development (Khilnani 1999: 78-81). Power was given to the bureaucracy to promote state-driven growth and industrialization, support centralized planning, and lead efficient utilization of resources; yet in doing so, he inadvertently created an extensive network of industrial and commercial regulation that gave way to the "license raj" in which the allocation and sale of licenses and permits was controlled by a few key leaders in the bureaucracy. Infractions committed by bureaucrats were dealt with at the party level and rarely met with legal sanctions, thereby, allowing bureaucrats to misuse their acquired powers and allowing corruption in the political system to persist (Singh 1997: 30-3). The failure to convict politicians could partially be attributed to Nehru, who overlooked violations in the name of development, and partially on India's outdated legal system. The Indian Penal Code, the primary measure used to contend with crime, was enacted in 1860 and was largely influenced by the British Raj. The laws, reflective of the British's distrust and disregard for Indians, were created with stipulations that prolonged legal action, delayed court sentencing, and allowed officials to dodge charges. In most cases, the suit never reached a hearing or the accused was acquitted or not punished. The failure of the judicial system prevented any deterrence (Sodhi 2000: 10-1).

Paul and Shah, also, have pointed to bureaucracy as a major cause of corruption in India; where Paul and Shah differ is that they attribute corruption to a bureaucrat's access and management of key resources as the source of corruption. They identified that the governments control over crucial goods and services as a cause as it fosters opportunities for corrupt practices and there is an incentive for those who are involved in those corrupt practices such as exchanging key resources for bribes (Quah 2008: 242). In a bureaucratic structure, officers are actively involved in planning projects for a district, passing and sanctioning proposals, and monitoring funds; having authority in such important matters makes officers and bureaucrats particularly susceptible to political influence.

In a situation when faced with political demands and pressure, bureaucrats often have no other choice than to comply with demands. Under the Indian Constitution, IAS officers and few other officials cannot be removed or fired from office; they can only be transferred or temporarily suspended. When such strong authority is placed in the hands of politicians, it has the potential to be misused. Cases of transfer to rural or unwanted posts are not unheard of, in fact, it is publicly known. In 2004, former CM Uma Bharathi transferred 240 of the Madhya Pradesh's 296 IAS officers; she transferred officials who she thought backed the previous Digvijay Singh government³. In more recent times, CM Mayawati suspended four IAS agents for merely making a positive statement about Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi. Bureaucrats and officers who try to maintain a clean image or try to reduce corruption in the system are penalized. In a case that went to the Bombay High Court, Arun Bhatia, an officer, was

³ Digvijay Singh was the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh before Uma Bharathi. Singh is affiliated with the Congress Party, while Bharathi is part of the Bharatiya Janshakti Party, which was allied with the BJP.

transferred 26 times in his career because he refused to meet the demands of local politicians (Vaidya 2010).

Jayaprakash Narayan asserted that the bureaucracy has played a crucial role in corruption and misuse of public power and laws and, many times, the bureaucrat is not a victim of politicians but an abettor. The “camaraderie” between political figures like the MLA and an officer is deeply ingrained in India and these relationships are formed as soon as a bureaucrat or officer enters begins the job. Civil servants have much to gain from these partnerships such as better postings and higher incomes, while politicians can also benefit financially and push through their political agenda. Those in lower bureaucratic positions can also reap the benefits of their job. With the influence, power, and many opportunities, low-ranked officers willingly and easily indulge in acts of corruption. In a bureaucratic system as highly centralized and expansive as the Indian system, officers and bureaucrats are not only protected by politicians but also by the anonymity that comes from being part of such a large civil service (Narayan n.d.).

The argument that corruption is caused by excessive bureaucracy tends to be dominated by proponents with right-wing leanings and economist who argue for economic liberalization. Those in favor of liberalization contend that bureaucratic regulation of resources has led to systemic abuses by bureaucrats and politicians. Economic liberalization would prevent resource allocation biases, exploitation by politicians, and ultimately, corruption.

India’s route to economic liberalization started in 1991. With investor confidence at an all-time low and pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), PM Narasimha Rao, the

successor after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, and head of the Financial Ministry Manmohan Singh shifted the economic policy from a socialist-influenced planning to a process of economic liberalization (Khilnani 1999: 95). Socialist economic policies stunted the growth of the private sector and fostered political patronage. Leading economists such as Jagdish Bhagwati assert that liberalization would reduce investment in industries that were state-protected and therefore, shielded from competition, halt bureaucratic control, and lessen the corruption and inefficiencies present in the state-controlled economy and political system (Khilnani 1999: 97).

However, the rise in corruption within the last decade does not support the idea that bureaucracy gives rise to corruption. Leaders in the UPA government⁴ under Manmohan Singh, the current Prime Minister and the man who headed India's economic reform, have been accused of embezzling millions. The current political and business scene is marred with one scandal after the next with each scam larger than the previous one. India since 1995 has consistently been dropping in the Corruption Perception Index ranks. Liberalization seems to have increased not decreased corruption. In effect, economic liberalization has led to new avenues of corrupt practices via decentralization and deregulation (Singh 1997: 637-8).

Bureaucracy may *facilitate* corruption among elected officials and bureaucrats as it provides ample opportunity and allows officials to hide in its vastness but the increase in corruption post liberalization suggest that it is not the *root* of corruption in the Indian political system.

⁴ Refer to 2G telecoms and Adarsh housing scandals in the Introduction.

Though culture and bureaucracy persist strongly in the rhetoric concerning corruption, many scholars identify India's old and unique social structure as the root of corruption. The origins of the caste system stem from section of the *Vedas*, a Sacred Hindu text, known as *Manava Dharma Shastra* which was written between 1500 and 1000 BC. There are variations to the story of how the four caste came to be, but it is thought to be that the castes are derived from the sacrifice of Purusa, the first man, or Brahma; the *Brahmin*, the highest caste, came from the mouth, the *Kshatriya* was born from his arm, the *Vaishya* from the thighs, and the *Shudra*, the lowest caste, was formed from his feet. The story not only reveals the origins of the castes, but also the functions of the castes in society. The Brahmins are the instructors or teachers to man, the Kshatriya are warriors and it is their *dharma* to protect the people, the Vaishya are merchants and agriculturalists, and the Shudra are described as servants and laborers (Singh 2005: 21-2).

The social hierarchy and differences in terms of profession gave rise to the *jajmani* system, the basis of the rural economy. Oscar Lewis described the *jajmani* system as an organization in which "each caste group within a village is expected to give certain standardized services to the families of other castes" (Sharma 2004: 142). In the system, every member has a function such as a dhobi washes clothes; a barber cuts hair and plays matchmaker, and a Brahmin perform religious rites and ceremonies. Within the *jajmani* system, a series of patron-client relationships are also present. In his fieldwork, Lewis noted the presence of the relationship in numerous states in India such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab⁵.

⁵ Refer to Lewis's case study: *Village Life in Northern India*, University of Illinois Press (Illinois, 1958).

In the system, the family that is entitled or request a service from another person or group is regarded as the *jajman* or patron. The person or group that works for someone else is the *kameen* or client. The jajman and kameen relationship was highly prevalent in rural agrarian societies (Sharma 2004: 142-3). In the jajmani system there were two different types of relationships: unbroken and hereditary. The unbroken relationship was one in which the kameen was obligated to provide his services to the jajman for the duration of his life, in exchange for his services, the jajman would hire the clan of the that kameen and provide other goods such as food and clothes. Often the jajman-kameen relationship would become hereditary and the son of a kameen would work for the jajman family. After working with each other for generations, both the kameen and jajman would become dependent on each other (Breman 1974: 19).

Though many referred to the paternalistic element present in the jajman-kameen relationship, the undertone of exploitation cannot be ignored. The money and goods that the kameen received in exchange for his services were not seen as a payment for his work but it was viewed as a gift and it was on behest of the generosity of the jajman. Frequently, the jajman would underpay the kameen for his work in the fields and around the house. The kameen was bonded to this relationship partly due to his explicit hereditary duty to serve the jajman but also partly due to his status (Breman 1974: 20-2). Typically in a village, the poorest and lowest caste members tended to be kameen, while the dominant caste achieved jajman status therefore, making it increasingly difficult for a kameen to rise against the jajman (Breman 1974: 57-8).

The dominant caste was able to maintain their influential position, augment their prestige, and enhance their power in a village by using the services and labor of the kameen and by corruption.

The idea of caste dominance was first proposed by Srinivas in his ethnography, *The Remembered Village*. Caste dominance, as proposed by Srinivas, occurs when a caste numerically dominates over the other castes in a village and holds significant local economic and political power. The power of the dominant caste is reflected in the institutional form of village councils: the panchayat, in which these councils can lead maneuvers to defuse threats to the power and authority of the dominant caste. Apart from village councils, the dominant caste was able to maintain their political and economic power in the region via “informal means” such as caste solidarity and other forms of influence (i.e. bribes) to obtain favors and support from district-level politicians and leaders. In effect, indulging in corrupt practices enabled the dominant caste to retain their caste dominance in a locality (Craig 2001: 234-6).

For example, Craig in his study of sugarcane farmers in Uttar Pradesh (UP) found that the dominant caste, Jat, used various forms of ‘investments’ to secure and enhance their standing. Ironically, rich Jats had a greater tendency to initiate protest against corruption, while developing relations and influencing Sugarcane Society officials and politicians. The odd behavior could partly be explained by language used by Jats to explain their camaraderie with officials. Jats who used bribes to influence Cane Society Officials regarded their bribe as a gift, but describe a bribe given by other castes as *brashtyachar* or corrupt (Craig 2002: 38).

Historically at the village level, the social hierarchy induced by the caste system, the patron-client relationships created by the jajmani system and corruption have enabled the domination by the higher castes while leading to the subordination of the lower caste. In modern Indian democracy, the caste system and corruption are still at play but patron-client relationships have changed.

Chandra describes India as a patronage democracy which she defines as a “state that monopolizes access to jobs and services, and in which elected officials have discretion in the implementation of laws allocating the jobs and services at the disposal of the state”(Chandra 2003: 20). Patronage democracy creates a sense of clientelism in which elected politicians with access to certain key resources exchange them with voters in return, but they do so on an individual basis. Categorizing a group of voters based on caste becomes a useful tool for politicians to keep track of these exchanges and relationships.

Singh also points to political patronage as a source of corruption, but in a different sense than Chandra. Singh claims that the political mobilization of the lower caste starting in the late 1980s has been achieved through state patronage and corrupt practices on the part of lower caste leaders. In defense of these corrupt acts, lower caste leaders argue that they are simply indulging in the same corrupt practices of the higher castes. The use of corrupt practices by the low caste has led to the unification and mobilization of groups that have been neglected in the political arena and has created a new group of political activists who are able to form connections between the government and interest groups. The outcome of newly secured political power and representation influences the perception of corruption among the poor and lower castes. The idea of corruption as a legal or moral concept is not supported or held by the

lower castes as they have been consistently victimized by the political system and social institutions of India. For scheduled castes (SC) and other backward classes (OBC), corruption is viewed a survival strategy that allows them to gain political standing in a system in which most politicians are thought or believed to be corrupt (Singh 1997: 634-5).

Singh's idea resonates across popular discourse in India. Caste-based voting and caste corruption dominates popular perception. Recently, Andimuthu Raja, a Cabinet Minister, was implicated in a scandal for distributing 2G bandwidth licenses illegally by giving licenses on a first-come basis and not auctioning. The response to corruption allegations was quickly morphed into a caste issue. The DMK leader M. Karunanidhi issued the statement that A. Raja was "targeted because he is a Dalit." There is no reference or response to the corruption charge, but the focus is strictly on Raja's low caste status (Times of India 2010). Caste has been used to excuse, justify, or divert attention away from corruption.

Studying Corruption in India

The current literature asserts corruption in the Indian political system as a product of the culture, bureaucracy, and caste system. Akin to the current literature, my study will address the questions:

- Why people continue to vote for corrupt politicians?
- Why is corruption so prevalent in the Indian political system?
- Why does corruption continue to persist?

My study will focus on understanding how corruption works at the local political level and examine and extrapolate the data to provide insight on the aforementioned questions. I will also demonstrate that corruption cannot solely be attributed to one of these factors; corruption arises and persists due to a combination of factors including caste, electoral finances, and patronage.

Methods

I have moved ten different times, lived in four different countries, and literally crossed the Seven Seas. I was born in India and left by the age of two. I don't really remember much from it—I can't recall the smell, my neighbors, or the monkeys outside my bedroom window that my mother swears I would cry at the sight of. Though I can't recollect anything, and even after living in the United States for over twenty years, when someone asks me out of curiosity where I am from I automatically say India.

Growing up in America, my parents and grandparents (I lived in an extended family) always made sure I knew about India—I was surrounded by the language, the customs, the stories of my parent's villages, and my favorite topic: politics. I was first introduced to Indian politics by my dad, a political enthusiast. During every election, regardless of whether it was a municipal, state, or national election, my dad was on the phone with my relatives back in India or watching the news for a minute-by-minute update. I began to share my dad's interest and started to closely follow Indian politics. I would read the newspaper, look at political websites, and watch the news daily.

Then last year, one corruption case after another made headlines. Each scandal was larger than the next. Soon, I started reading headlines change from India as the next emerging power to corruption suppressing India's rise. I always knew corruption existed within the system, it was the subject of countless Bollywood movies and I had heard enough stories from relatives to know that it was not just a problem—it was an enormous problem. Everyone spoke contemptuously about corruption, yet I could never understand how corruption came to become such a big issue in India and why the people are allowing it to continue. India is

considered to be the world's largest democracy, the people can choose who holds office and who doesn't, so how do the corrupt always get elected?

To understand corruption and answer my question, I decided to go to my ancestral town in India. I choose my town because my family has political connections and I would be able to interview politicians and party members. I also chose the town because I was well acquainted with the political situation in the area. Before leaving, I had completed my literature review which provided me a background on current theories of corruption and the historical context.

In the town, I lived with my dad's extended family. The house was in the center of the town behind the temple. After getting acquainted with the town and speaking with my great-uncle, who was a Corporator⁶, I decided to conduct my focus groups. I knew it would be difficult to create these focus groups on my own as I didn't know anyone in the town or provide an incentive for anyone to talk to me. I asked my Aunt, a doctor at the local hospital and overseer of the Anganwadi Program⁷, to create groups that I could talk to. My first focus group was comprised of all women who were not of the dominant caste. My second focus group comprised of mainly women as well but they were much younger. The women were candid about their political positions and openly shared their stories.

Next, I started to conduct my interviews. Coming from a family with political connections I was able to set up an interview with the Member of Parliament (MP), the current Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), and the ex-MLA who also happens to be the current

⁶ Corporator is akin to an alderman, which is a member in a municipal council or body.

⁷ The Anganwadi Program is a welfare scheme that aims to reduce malnourishment in young children and is supported by the central government. Since my aunt oversees the program, it enabled me to talk to workers of the program who are primarily middle-class literate women.

Pramukh. I conducted the interviews in person and also was given their phone numbers for further questions. Though I was supposed to conduct only three interviews, I was told that I did not completely know the entire story. After I probed further, I was given the contact information of two corporate leaders. Through my association with a few political leaders and relatives, I was able to interview them as well. During my focus groups and interviews, I did not take notes on site because I realized it would limit the conversation or make my informants feel uncomfortable. I took mental notes of the conversation and in the car I would write down everything I could remember from the interview. I also kept in contact with my informants after I returned from India and continued interviews via phone over several months.

Choosing my own town for my ethnographic research had many benefits as well as drawbacks that I had to be conscious about and consider. The advantages of choosing my town include: knowing the language, being aware of the political situation, and having connections with local politicians. In conducting my interviews, I found knowing the language to be very helpful. During my focus groups, the women were only educated to the tenth standard at most and were enlisted in Gujarati-medium school. Also the politicians, though they would start to respond to my question in English, they would change to Gujarati midway. Being fluent in the language and understanding regional colloquialism enabled me to connect and build a rapport with the people. Also, being aware of the political situation was particularly useful as I could understand references made by the people and politicians and likewise refer to specific elections and events during my interviews. My greatest advantage, however, was my connection to politicians. To study corruption in politics, I felt that it was essential to obtain the perspective of politicians who are direct participants of the system. My access without

connections would be severely restricted and I would not be able to ascertain a crucial perspective regarding corruption.

Throughout my research, I continually had to consider my drawbacks. One concern was my status as a *Patidar*, the dominant caste in the town. Though the label comes with many advantages such as access to top officials, I recognized that it would limit my contact with low castes in the town. Being a Patidar, it would be difficult to build a rapport with the Dalit community and I had to consider that they may answer my questions with much caution and hesitation. Additionally since different caste lived in different areas of the town, I could not simply start a conversation with a low caste member without drawing attention to myself. The little access I did have with Dalits came from exchanges I had while shopping, taking rickshaws, and walking to the temple.

My main drawback and concern was balancing my status as both an 'outsider' and 'insider'. Although a strong part of my identity comes from my Indian ethnicity, I was raised completely in the United States and been heavily influenced by the Western Culture. I had to be aware of my Western bias and assess the data relative to the culture and without ethnocentrism. As an insider of the Patidar caste, I had to separate myself to a certain degree to be as objective as possible; this was imperative especially while researching and writing the history of the Patidar caste.

While writing the literature review and looking into the background of the Kheda district, the status and predominance of the Patidar caste was frequently highlighted. I recognized that the history of the caste would be an important component in understanding the

current political system. To write the ethno-history of the Patidar caste, I relied on interviews, ethnographies and scholarly papers, and Samaj websites. As a researcher exploring my own history, I had to be cautious of not solely focusing on the positives of the Patidar caste and overlooking any negative aspects. The interviews and Samaj websites (sites that run by Patidar organizations) often overlooked or euphemistically characterized the dominance of the Patidar over the lower castes. Being from the dominant caste, it was, at times, difficult to read the corrupt practices and misuse by the Patidar, but I had to remain unbiased and walk the thin line between being an inside Patidar and an outside researcher.

Taking into account both the advantages and disadvantages of conducting research in my ancestral town, I believe that the advantage of having access to key political figures and fluency in the language outweighed the potential disadvantages.

-Chapter 1-

The Ethnohistory of the Patidars

Coming to Gujarat

For three weeks, I traveled to what felt like every part of India—from the North to the South, the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea, and from large metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Chennai to small rural villages such as Bagru and Alwar. Gujarat was my last stop. After getting stuck in terrible Mumbai traffic on the Worli Bridge and waiting through a three hour flight delay, I finally arrived in Ahmedabad. My friends were waiting right outside the doors of the airport, ready to pick me up. Getting into the car, I couldn't help but wonder what Gujarat had in store for me.

As I looked out the window, I was amazed and I had to check if I was in America or not. We were cruising down in a six-lane highway lined with large glass buildings on both sides. All the lights, the people sitting at restaurants late in the night, youngsters cruising in their new Toyotas and Hondas lip-syncing "Baby" by Justin Bieber; this is what I see in Chicago all the time, I couldn't believe that I was in one of the most conservative states in India.

As we drove towards Nadiad, the bright lights and smooth asphalt highways were replaced by shrubbery and dirt roads. Finally we arrived in Nadiad, about an hour away from Ahmedabad. It was not the ancestral village I had in mind. It was not like the small villages in the north with no electricity and one room houses, it was akin to a suburb in America. The most discernable landmark in Nadiad is the temple that stands taller than all the other

buildings. Around the temple were private vendors who sold milk, items for *puja* (prayer), and food. Farther from the temple, about five minutes walking, was a complex with twenty white houses. We turned into the little gully and into the first white house.

I was greeted by a hoard of relatives, one after the other, asking me if I remembered them, awing at how much I had grown over the years, and arguing whether I looked like my mom or dad. After sitting awkwardly for some time, the dreaded topic finally arrived: my marriage. My great-aunt, quickly before I could get a word in, started on how I should find someone Indian, but I didn't have to worry, as she would find me a good educated Patel. I seized the moment I had to ask, why a Patel?

In Gujarati, my Great-Aunt quickly responded, "We need a boy from our samaj (community), they have the same values and morals, the others...not good, you can't marry a villager. He should be ours, one of us." Villager, or *gamadiyo*, as long as I could remember was always connected with a negative connotation. My relatives even from America often use it to describe those who are not Patel.

The Patidar History

The Patidar caste is a large predominant caste found mainly in Gujarat. The people recognized as Patidar were previously known as *Kanbi*. The word Kanbi means "farmer" and originated from the term "kutumbi" or householder (Pocock 1972: 56). The Kanbi transformation to a different caste identity is largely influenced by history and social interactions.

Within the Kanbi caste, there are two major factions—the *Leva* and *Kadva*. The emergence and categorization of the two groups is widely disputed and subject to much folklore. Traditional members of the Leva Patidar believe that they are the descendents of Lord Ram’s two sons, Luv and Khus, hence the two factions Leva and Kadva. Others assert similar origins, but instead of being direct heirs of Luv and Khus, the ancestors of Patidars aided Lord Ram’s sons in their sacrificial performance⁸ (Pocock 1972: 56). While some modern Patidar connect their history to Hindu mythology, most attribute the divisions in the Patidar caste to geography. Modern Patidar assert that people who came from the village Leva in Punjab were named the Leva Kanbi, while those who hailed from Karad were called the Karadva Kanbi, which was later shortened to Kadva Kanbi (Patel and Patel n.d.: 3). Some allege that the names originated from the terms Reva, referring to the Narmada River, and Kadi, a division in the former state of Baroda (Pocock 1972: 56)). Today the Kadva Kanbi reside mainly in northern Gujarat and Ahmedabad while, the Leva Kanbi, the focus of the study, live in and around the Kheda district.

Though the origin of the two factions is subject to much debate there is common consensus among the Patidar regarding their origins. The Patidar caste traces their roots back to Punjab. Stories and oral history suggests that around 1000-1100 AD during the Islamic Invasions, the people of the Kanbi caste left Punjab and moved to Marvad in Rajasthan. The story is widely contested as some sections of the Patidar place the migration of the Kanbi to

⁸ Many castes, especially the lower castes, link their caste identity to Hindu mythology and folklore. The connection is used to legitimize and substantiate the caste identity. For example, the Yadav caste that catapulted to political domination in Bihar in the 1990s under the leadership of Laloo Prasad Yadav. The Yadav caste is listed as other backward class (OBC) and the historical occupation of the caste is identified as cattle herders. The Yadav community believe themselves to be the descendants of the Yadu Dynasty also known to be the lineage of Lord Krishna (Yadav 2010).

Gujarat as early as 300 BC in response to the mistreatment and attacks by Iranian Kings and their armies. Once in Marvad, the Kanbi faced great difficulty sustaining themselves as there was little cultivable land that they could till. With notice of available farmable land in Gujarat, the Kanbi migrated to Khambhat (Patel and Patel n.d.: 2).

Once the Kanbi arrived in Gujarat (in the present day Kheda district) they requested a land grant from the King of the Solanki Dynasty. Land equivalent to one village in the area of Petlad was given to each family and was settled and cultivated by the Kanbi (Patel and Patel n.d.: 3). In exchange for the land, a portion of the crops each year had to be given to the King. In order to guarantee the correct portion of crops was given back each year, the King appointed a headman to the village who was responsible for keeping records of the crops in a *patta*, or a log book. The official title given to the headmen was *Patlik*, which was later shortened to *Patal*, and then to *Patel* (Leuva Patidar Samaj).

The kingdoms and its rulers changed, but the system of crops in exchange for land did not change. Moreover, the system of collecting crops and appointing officials became more complex and firmly ingrained in the region. The Solanki rule was replaced by the Mauryavansi. Allaudin Khiliji ruled Gujarat after the Mauryavansi for about two decades. Khiliji was then succeeded by Mohammed Bagdo. During the time of Bagdo, the exchange between the Kanbi and the King changed dramatically. Bagdo eliminated the practice of giving crop for land and established permanent propriety of the land. He chose the best farmers and distributed the land, and in return the farmers had to pay the kingdom on a predetermined cash base and after a period of time, the cultivator would gain full possession of the land. The Kanbi who gained

control of land were known as *Patidar*, derived from the word *pati*, land, and *dar*, owner. It was also under Mughal rule that the revenue-collection system grew considerably. The revenue-collecting officials selected by the Mughal were often incidentally the flourishing agriculturalists in the region—the Patidar (Patel and Patel n.d.: 3-5). The Patidar were not only landowners, but now they held an elevated social status due to their given position.

The Mughal regime started to crumble in Gujarat after over a century of rule. The Maratha invaded Gujarat and divided the state into *rasti* and *mehwasi*, or peaceful and troubled villages, respectively. The peaceful villages were managed by appointed officials, who were from the dominant caste. The appointed official at the district level was known as the *komavisdar*. The *Desai* worked under the chief revenue collector (komavisdar) and was given the authority to utilize judicial power on the Chief's behalf. The *Amin* was below the Desai in terms of position and his duties were to aid the Desai in assessing revenue from the villages. The Patel was the headman of the village and was in charge of the actual collection of revenue and carried out the orders from above. The officials in each village kept an armed force which was sanctioned by the Maratha as the forces aided in collecting revenue from the disorderly mehwasi villages. The positions, like they were during the Mughal Era, became inherited from generation to generation and the power and status of the officials was measured by their success garnering revenue, wealth, and taxes from the classes and workers under their jurisdiction (Bates 1981: 773).

The appointed officials enjoyed undue tremendous power under the Maratha regime, but that power started to deteriorate under the British. As the British started to colonize

Gujarat in the 1800s, they began to alter the firmly embedded revenue collection system. The first group to lose their power in the system was the *Girasia*, or the “superior landowners”, of the Rajput caste. The Desai group, which had become a highly privileged class, was the next group to be removed from the collection system (Pocock 1972: 58). However, their removal proved to be immensely difficult as did the removal of the Amin and Patel groups. The British tried to simplify the collection system with the exclusion of those classes, but their decision was met with much revolt. Influenced by the dominant class of Desai and Amin, the heads of village stopped collecting revenues and the Brahmins did not allow the British to survey their land. Though the removal was not peaceful, slowly the appointed officials lost their positions or were placed in other menial roles (Bates 1981: 774-5).

The economy and growth of Gujarat by the 1820s was noticeably decreasing⁹. Yet, the British observed that while in times of an economic depression, a few villages were thriving. The successful regions were the *nurwa* villages located in the Kheda district. The shareholders and landowners in the villages were called *nurwadar*, the group consisted of peasants who referred to themselves as Leva Patidar, a title they adopted to substantiate their status over that of other Kanbi and working class. The Leva Patidar were the dominant caste in the *nurwa* villages in terms of both economic strength and in population, they constituted one-third of the Charotar¹⁰ population (Bates 1981: 776).

⁹ Correspondence letters from Captain Prescott, the Gujarat revenue survey superintendent, conveyed that he believed that the severity of the depression was exacerbated by the British government’s movement to remove Patels who he asserted were crucial to the village economy (Bates 1981: 775).

¹⁰ Charotar refers to a region that includes the towns and cities: Nadiad, Anand, Karamsad, Kanam, Vadodara, Bharuch, Surat, and Valsad (All are found in southern Gujarat) and numerous small villages.

The nurwa villages had a unique organization which allowed them to be profitable. The *khadkiyaan* (households) that established the village retained a set amount of the village land, while the rest of the land was held jointly by both the *khadkiyaan* and tenants. The tenants of the nurwadar were poor members of the *Koli* caste, Kanbi, and lesser Patidar¹¹ (Bates 1981: 777). The rental of the common land was essential in retaining power in the village. The annual revenue collected by the government was paid from profits generated from the common land and any shortages were paid by the nurwadar in accordance to the size and ownership of the land. The nurwadar also happened to be in charge of revenue collection; in such a case, the nurwadar placed the cost of revenue on tenants and strengthened their status and power in the village.

Oddly, the removal of the old Maratha revenue collection system and the onset of the new British administration system that had at one point proven to be detrimental to the Patidar especially the Desai class was now to their advantage, specifically in the eight nurwa villages. The new revenue system, though highly bureaucratic and standardized, led to vast economic inequalities among shareholders, cultivators, and villages. In the British survey system, some proprietors such as those of the *mullek* class, Muslims who were given land in exchange for their service in the military, faced heavy tax rates, whilst the nurwadar in the Charotar region enjoyed comparatively low rates (Bates 1981: 780). The difference in treatment and rates was politically and financially motivated. For the British colonizers, questioning the authority of the dominant caste would prove to be disastrous as it did in the past with the attempts at removing

¹¹ The lesser Patidar are differentiated from the wealthy Patidar prior to 1931. Though they are treated like the Kanbi by the wealthy Patidar, they are distinguished from the wealthy Patidar as they do not possess large landholdings and are typically tenants. They separate themselves from the Kanbi by claiming a Patidari lineage.

appointed officials of the Maratha system. Even more, the nurwadar land renting system was lucrative to the British government (Bates 1981: 781).

To keep the revenues high, the British provided incentives to the Patidar in the Charotar nurwa villages; incentives to the Patidar provided by the British include: paying a rate half of the normal common rate that tenants were taxed at, keeping half of the produce cultivated by tenants, and uncultivated land was appraised at one-fourth the normal rate and if the Patidar did cultivate that land, the British did not collect revenue from the production. The surveying and collection system favored the wealthy Patidar and some lesser-standing Patidar, but severely hurt the “Kanbi” and lower-caste tenants such as the Koli and mullek. As the tenants were subject to excessively high rates and divested of their income and rights to the land, many had to mortgage their land to the Patidar and attempt to pay annual revenue and taxes to the government (Bates 1981: 783-4).

The Patidar under the new survey system lost their administrative duties; however, they were able to maintain their dominance over the village economy by solely utilizing their ownership of land. The wealthy Patidar did not tend to their fields; they hired laborers at different prices. The *bhagdari* laborer was given half of the crops in exchange for his work. Also, there were *bhagia* and *chakar* laborers, the former was given a fixed payment all year round while the later was given money, clothes, and food and worked seasonally. Along with paid laborers, they were also bonded laborers. It was often found that *chakar* laborers were actually bonded laborers who occasionally received gifts such as food and clothes from the landowners

(Pocock 1972: 22). Many of laborers with no land of their own to mortgage were caught in a cycle of hereditary servitude.

The mid-1800s were marked with great economic success for the Patidar class, and then in 1899 the Great Famine hit Gujarat. Gujarat was struck with a famine, roughly every seventeen to twenty years, but there had only been one truly debilitating famine. In the 1890s, there was a sharp decline in the cultivation of tobacco¹² and the price of grains was steeply rising. The Kheda district, this time, along with the rest of Gujarat was severely affected by the economic downturn and famine (Bates 1981: 802). The Patidar class was not insulated from the conditions and met with tremendous financial challenges. The tenants abandoned the land and cattle and many from the lower class left for Ahmedabad in the hopes of procuring some work. The landless laborers like the tenants faced financial hardship as well as heightened mortality. In this depression, the lesser Patidar and the common Kanbi, not the nurwadar, emerged as highly resilient and, in fact, slightly benefited from the Great Famine.

The lesser Patidar and the Kanbi unlike the wealthy Patidar did not have to rely on laborers for profit; instead, they could rely on their own skills. The wealthy Patidar had to write off the debt of the laborers and tenants as they were nowhere to be found or could not feasibly pay; those tenants that stayed in Kheda had their land revoked, but the land gained from those tenants was usually unfertile or of inferior quality (Bates 1981: 803). The land gained from the tenants due to their failure to pay proved to be detrimental as the acquired land increased taxes for the wealthy Patidar. The conditions only worsened for the Patidar as rent on land plummeted. By 1901, the government decided to dismiss the debt of the lower caste, but still

¹² Tobacco was the primary cash crop in the talukas of Nadiad, Anand, Petlad, and Borsad (Pocock 1972: 19).

collect revenue from money-lenders, which happened to be the Patidar (Bates 1981: 804). The resolution in 1901 distressed the power the wealthy Patidar class had over the village economy.

The lesser Patidar and Kanbi were able to take advantage of a few enacted laws by the British during this period. According to the Agriculturalist Loans Act of 1884, self-cultivators residing in the Kheda district could apply and request an interest free loan. Moreover under the Revenue Code Amendment Act, they gained land in the Kheda district as a result of the division of the large land holdings owned by the wealthy Patidar (Bates 1981: 804). The self-cultivating Patidar and Kanbi were no longer tenants, but independent farmers.

The lesser Patidar and Kanbi with debts paid off and newly acquired land were rising as the new dominant caste. The Patidar and Kanbi started growing expensive cash-crops, such as cotton and tobacco that were typically grown by the wealthy Patidar as they previously were the only group that could afford the equipment and provide the required labor, and investing in ventures like cotton mills and the dairy industry (Bates 1981: 806). The lesser Patidar and Kanbi dominated the Kheda district in terms of economic strength and in numbers, the census reports of 1921 and 1931 indicated forty-five percent of the region constituted of self-cultivating famers (Bates 1981: 808).

The gap between the wealthy Patidar and lesser Patidar and Kanbi was further closed by the success of the latter group abroad. During the time of the Great Famine, many from Patidar-Kanbi caste immigrated to Eastern Africa in hopes of reaping some earnings from the trade route between India and Africa. At first, many worked as laborers or clerks, but within a few decades many from the Patidar community had become members of a wealthy Indian

trading community in Africa. Most sent their earning back to India, where it was invested in land and other property. The lesser Patidar and Kanbi group was able to compete with the wealthy Patidar in terms of land, wealth, and house size (Pocock 1972: 63).

With newly accumulated wealth and land in the hands of the Kanbi, their status underwent much change in the 1900s. British census records from 1901 indicate that there were distinguishable differences among the Kanbi and Patidar such that there were few cases of inter-marriage between the classes especially as the wealthy Patidar tried to solidify their identity from the lower class; yet, by 1931, the title of Kanbi was no longer in use and Patidar was adopted in its place (Pocock 1972: 63). Within years, Patel became the most common last name for the entire caste. Patidar may have become the name for the entire caste, but the title and term Patidar remained fluid. A man who regarded himself as a Patidar could still be considered a Kanbi by other caste members. The variability in the definition of a Patidar along with conflict and exclusivity within the caste uniquely separated the Patidar from other caste (Pocock 1972: 67). While other caste such as the Anvil Brahmin, Dhed, and Bhang¹³ had economic and status graduality present within their caste, they could easily discern between caste members and non-members. In the Patidar caste, having the last name Patel or owning land did not gain a member acceptance into the caste. As it was difficult to identify an original Patidar, many lesser Patidar and Kanbi who newly assumed the Patidar title made claims to Patidari lineage (Pocock 1972: 71).

There was great stratification within the Patidar caste in terms of money and customs. Many castes had defining customs such as some practiced vegetarianism strictly, others held

¹³ Dhed and Bhang are both considered low castes.

their status by rejecting the food or water of “lower” jati, and some castes were marked with religious customs such as animal sacrifice. The Patidar customs and practices greatly varied within the caste. On one hand, there were members of the Patidar-caste that openly indulged in alcohol, did not practice vegetarianism, assisted in sacrifices to the gods, gave dowry as well as bride-prices, and few allowed the re-marriage of widows. On the other hand, there were Patidar members who faithfully followed *Vaishnavism*¹⁴ and vegetarianism and did not condone bride-prices or widow remarriage (Pocock 1972: 64). The lesser Patidar and Kanbi could not simply adopt the practices of the Patidar to gain acceptance from the community and caste.

For the Patidar, a confirmation of caste status came with marriage. Inter-marriage within the Patidar caste validated one’s position as a Patidar. Patidar marriages tended to be hypergamous, in which women were married up in terms of rank. In the Patidar community, marrying in rank did not mean marrying higher in the caste system, but marrying a man with a higher ‘status’ (Pocock 1972: 3). The Leva Patidar strongly looked at status and not caste divisions, partly because the caste status of the Patidar has been ardently debated.

The groups Kanbi and Patidar did not correlate to any set *varna* in the traditional caste system that consisted of the four divisions: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The Brahmin form the highest caste which consists of priest, the Kshatriya caste is composed of rulers and warriors, the Vaishya caste is the merchant class, and the Shudra is the lowest caste which consists of artisans and laborers¹⁵. The Patidar, at first, identified themselves in the Kshatriya caste. They believed that their caste were originally warriors who during times of peace tended to fields for livelihood. The Kshatriya were subject to great mal-treatment by

¹⁴ Vaishnavism is a sect of Hinduism in which devotees consider and worship Lord Krishna as the supreme God.

¹⁵ Additional information on the caste system refer to Literature Review, pg. 14-5.

foreign conquerors, and hence, they migrated to Gujarat (Leuva Patidar Samaj n.d.). The Brahmin of the Kheda district placed the Patidar in the Shudra caste. The Brahmin trace the roots of the Patidar to common laborers; however, this view is of Brahmins who have little interaction and are not financially dependent on the Patidar (Pocock 1972: 56). Today, Patidar of the Kheda district claim Vaishya as their varna¹⁶.

The Patidar have a distinctive marriage practice. Marriage is caste endogamous, village exogamous, and Samaj endogamous. When a Patidar marries, they marry within the caste to solidify their status as another Patidar. To increase status and prestige, the marriage has to be within the Samaj. A Samaj consists of a group of villages which then forms an *ekada*, or a marriage circles (Bates 1981: 778-9). A Samaj can vary in size; the Samaj groups¹⁷ that are present in the Charotar region are: *Chh gam*¹⁸ (six villages), *Panch*(five) Gam, *Chowd*(fourteen) Gam, *Sol*(sixteen) Gam, *Sattar*(seventeen) Gam, *Bavis*(twenty-two) Gam, and *Satyavis*(twenty-seven) gam. A Patidar from Chh Gam, a Samaj that consists of six villages (Vaso, Nadiad, Dharmaj, Bhadran, Karamsad, and Sojitra) will marry his son or daughter within these six villages but will not allow a marriage within his own village¹⁹. So a man from Nadiad can marry his son or daughter into any village of the ekada except for Nadiad. A Patidar will then approve a marriage match based on status; land possession and wealth are indicators of a Patidar's status and rank (Bates 1981: 786).

¹⁶ Field notes: All Patidar locals interviewed in Nadiad identified their varna as Vaishya. In fact, most Patidar proudly contended that they lived up to their name as merchants (Patidar are the leading businessmen in Gujarat and Vaishya translates to merchant).

¹⁷ A samaj usually is one ekada.

¹⁸ Gam translates to village

¹⁹ Field notes: Patidar describing the marriage process. The Patidar interviewed was from the Chh Gam Patidar Samaj.

With the lesser Patidar and Kanbi gaining wealth and land, they rightfully gained the Patidar title and the status. Distinctions between the Patidar and the Kanbi started to diminish by the early 1940s. The Patidar have organized themselves into a strong network that encompasses Kanbi, lesser Patidar, and wealthy Patidar.

Post Independence

The leadership and position of the Patidar post-independence was partly derived from their involvement in the nationalist movement. Members of the Patidar caste from the Kheda district became freedom-fighters, lead the Kheda Satyagraha²⁰, and catapulted into national leadership positions²¹. Thus, once independence was attained, there were no violent riots to remove the landowners or a movement to displace the Patidar. Instead of radical change, British institutions were maintained in the newly independent India. In fact, in a survey conducted by The Centre for Social Studies assessing landownership and castes in Gujarat found that approximately seventy percent of the Patidar own a minimum of six acres of land per household (Kohli 1990: 48). Though landownership and the political institutions did not change, the role of the Patidar did change from solely landowners to politicians.

In the 1960s, Gujarat was under the control of the undivided Congress Party. Though the Congress Party typically consisted of elite classes such as Brahmin and Baniya, the Patidar started to play a significant role specifically in Gujarat. The leaders from the higher caste

²⁰ The Kheda Satyagraha was a movement initiated by Gandhi and spearheaded by Sardar Patel. The Kheda Satyagraha of 1918 was a civil disobedience movement in which peasants successfully campaigned for tax relief. The movement was followed by the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928 which was completely led by Patel. The Kheda Satyagraha and Bardoli Satyagraha were not the first occurrences of Patidar involvement in politics. In 1907, Patidar men organized a program for that campaigned against dowry, lavish expenditures, and other national issues (Spodek 1971: 370-1).

²¹ Many Patidar joined the freedom movement; the most famous is Sardar Vallabhai Patel. He was known to be a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and later served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs (Kamat 1996).

occupied positions at the state-level, but the Patidar occupied positions throughout Gujarat at the district level especially Kheda. The Patidar dominated the Gujarat Congress Party until the mid 1960s and the rise of Indira Gandhi.

In 1969, the Congress Party was split into two factions by Indira Gandhi; Congress O (the O standing for organizational) represented the Old Congress Party, while Congress R was the reformed Congress that did not have the organizational structure of the old party, it had a new ideology. Congress R embraced a populist strategy and the signature slogan of India Gandhi: *Garibi Hatao* (remove poverty) (Kohli 1990: 42-3). In the 1971 elections, Indira Gandhi's reformed Congress swept the election polls. Politicians, especially of the Kshatriya caste, started to shift their loyalties to the new Congress. Congress R aligned with the Kshatriya, a populous caste in the state, along with the support of Dalits, Adivasi, and Muslims started to rule Gujarat politics²² (Kohli 1990: 44). Now the Patidar, were not the dominant figures in the ruling party, they were the dominant opposition to the ruling party. By 1985, the Kshatriya of Kheda occupied 19 of the 25 important political positions in the district. The political displacement of the Patidar has led to many conflicts and at times violent riots have been the result (Kohli 1990: 48).

The influence of the Patidar was threatened by the entrance of the Kshatriya caste in politics; however, the Kshatriya were unable to maintain power in the Kheda District due to the legitimized standing of the Patidar in the community and their economic backing. According to Kohli, the Patidar in the community were regarded as valid local leaders as they were not imposed by the centre and the leadership and high position of the Patidar within the

²² The alliance of Kshatriya, Dalits (Harijan), Adivasi, and Muslims was known as the KHAM strategy.

community was unanimously acknowledged (Kohli 1990: 54). The position and influence of the Patidar was widely known in society, and with a group so deeply ensconced in a community for hundreds of years, it became difficult for the Kshatriya to displace the Patidar from politics permanently. The Patidar were also able to use their financial position to reemerge in the political scene. As a local Patidar claimed to Kohli:

“Patels have found out, being rich, that every dog has its price. So they have decided to pay the price and get things done. These Kshatriyas have no principles. They are poor. So they can be bought” (Kohli 1990: 51).

Modern Kheda

Walking around Nadiad with my Aunt, the presence of the Patidar was quite evident. Many of the shops were owned by a Patel, there was entire section of the town named *Desaivago*, or Area of the Desai, and every few minutes I could hear someone yell “Ey Patel” to a random bystander. The influence of the Patidar was undeniable. The largest university in the town was named after a Desai and of the nine colleges; five were named after a Patel or Desai from the community. The main hospitals in Nadiad are both named after famed Patidars. I turned to my Aunt, the daughter of a Congress Party head, and asked her what percentage of the population is Patel. She responded, “Maybe twelve to fifteen percent.”

India has not had an official caste census since 1931; hence, many estimates regarding caste compositions are derived from observations by locals. According to estimates attained by Kohli, in the Kheda district, the two dominant castes Patidar and Kshatriya represented 60 percent of the population, followed by low caste at 33 percent, Muslims at 9 percent,

scheduled caste and tribals at 7 percent, Brahmin at 5 percent (Kohli 1990: 37). The percentages I received from speaking with the locals in Nadiad slightly differed. The locals believed that Nadiad comprised of 12-15 percent Patidar, 25-30 percent Rajput, 30 percent Dalits (low caste), 10-12 percent Muslim, 5-10 percent Brahmin, and 5 percent Tribal.

In a democracy in which each leader is elected directly by the people, it would be expected that the leader would be from the Rajput or Dalit caste as they are twice as populous as the Patidar, yet they do not hold the same political clout. Of the major positions in Nadiad, such as MLA, mayor, and municipality board members, all are currently occupied by members of the Patidar community. In fact, the last three MLAs of Nadiad have all been from the Patidar caste. The observations provoke the question: how do the Patidar maintain dominance in a modern democratic India?

The answer can be found by dissecting the ethno-history and understanding its implications for the contemporary Patidar identity and standing.

The Patidar Identity, Politics, and Brashtyachar

The modern Patidar identity and their dominance in the Charotar region is the result of a long historical process. The history also provides insight into the questions of why corruption is pervasive in the political system and how corrupt politicians are able to remain in the system.

After independence, the role and position that the Patidar occupied for centuries had become illegal. The Patidar were no longer allowed to have large land holding, were not supposed to collect revenue from tenants, and could no longer have hereditary laborers.

However, these changes were easier said than done. In fact, the dominant caste remained intact, the patron-client relationships endured, the governing institutions created by the British persevered, however, the one thing that did change was the designation of what constitutes as corrupt and not-corrupt. In a village community in which it was normal to give gifts to clients for loyalty and support was now deemed corrupt²³. Though the definition of corruption has changed in recent times and partly explains the rampant corruption in the system, the ethnohistory illustrates a history of corruption and exploitation. For example, the British provided undue advantages of the Patidar such as not collecting taxes certain parts of their land or reduce collect taxes at a lower rate. The system and practice of corruption has existed in the Kheda district for centuries and that to at the local level in which members of every class and caste were affected.

The ethnohistory also enables one to understand why it has been difficult removing corrupt politicians and why people vote for corrupt politicians. In Nadiad, the politicians are from the dominant caste. The caste has historically remained in power and has presided over the community. When voters are casting a vote, it is not between a Dalit and a Patidar or a Kshatriya and Patidar, it is always between a Patidar and another Patidar. Voters are voting for a candidate from the dominant caste and it is extremely difficult to root out a caste which holds such great influence financially, politically, and socially. This is not to say that all Patidar candidates are corrupt; corruption is widespread across India and is prevalent in all castes but it demonstrates that a voting decision in Nadiad is not limited to a politician's merit or public image; caste status is also highly considered.

²³ Patron-client interactions in modern India will be explored more closely in Chapter 2.

-Chapter 2-

The Political System

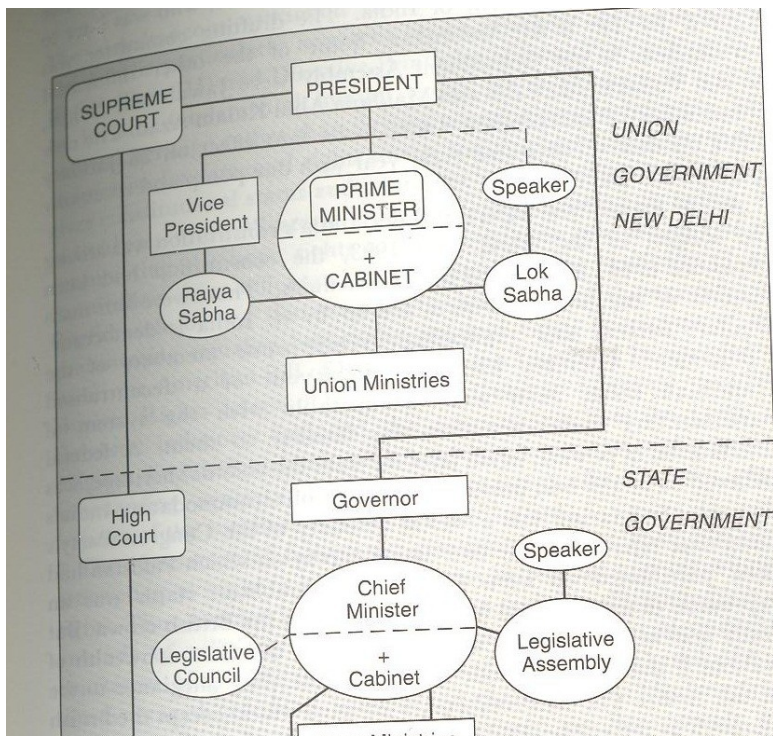
Overview

The basic structure of the government today is reflective of institutions established during the British Raj. Under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, power was divided between the state and central government; the state government was given authority on matters of education, health, and control of local governments. The Reforms also divided legislative functions between two chambers that would later become the *Lok Sabha* and *Rajya Sabha*. In 1935, the Government of India Act was passed which retained the federal features of the British institutions, but was more inclusive of Indians by allowing them to occupy more positions in the government and extending voting privileges²⁴ (Thakur 1995: 42). Post-independence, Nehru adopted the same political institutions and the Indian Constitution of 1950 completed the democratization of politics initiated by the British.

At the central level is the President followed by the Prime Minister and his cabinet along with the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha. At the state level is the Governor followed by the Chief Minister and his cabinet. Instead of the Lok and Rajya Sabha, there is a legislative Assembly and a Legislative Council. At the local level, there are both administrative divisions that are

²⁴ The Government of India Act allowed greater Indian participation in the political system. While there was greater democratization and involvement, the ability to vote and hold office remained limited as only males who were landowners, property taxpayers, or highly educated as deemed by the British could take part (Thakur 1995: 42)

connected to the State government and Panchayat authority (Refer to Figure 1).



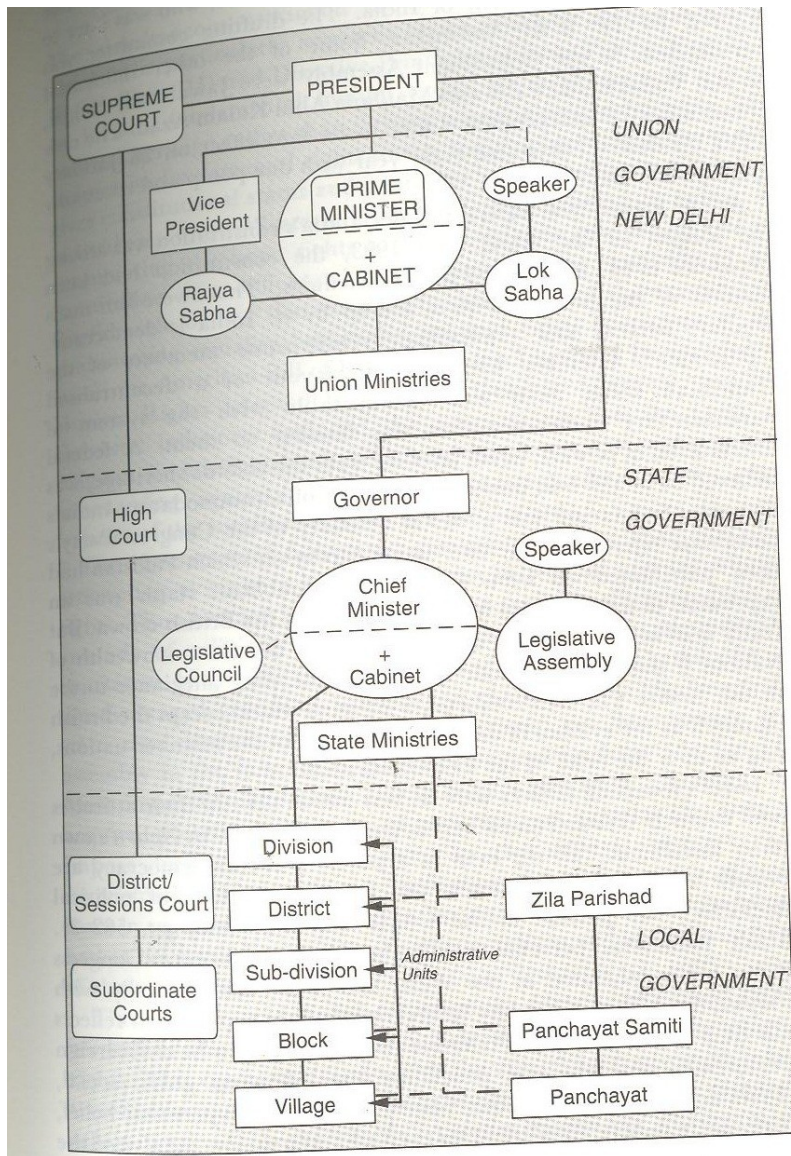


Figure 1. Governmental Structure of India. (Thakur 1995: 47)

The Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament, consists of 545 seats of which 543 are elected seats and two seats are appointed by the President to a representative who is of the Anglo-Indian community. Furthermore, of the 543 elected seats, 79 seats are reserved for scheduled tribes and 42 are reserved for scheduled tribes. In constituencies with reservations, all candidates running must be from the scheduled caste or tribe. Politicians elected into the

Lok Sabha are known as Members of Parliament (MP). Members of Parliament are elected directly by the people of the constituency (Thakur 1995: 139). The Rajya Sabha, the upper house of parliament, has 250 seats in which 238 are occupied by representatives of Indian states and territories and 12 seats are appointed by the President on the basis of knowledge and expertise, under-representation, and at times, political patronage. Members of the Rajya Sabha are elected by Members of Legislative Assembly, who are members elected into the State Assembly (Thakur 1995: 147). The number of seats a state is given in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha is based on population and demographics.

The State legislatures vary greatly in India, but in general, state assemblies must have a minimum of 40 members, and the members are chosen for a five-year term via direct voting by the people of the constituency. Officials voted into the state assembly are known as Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA). MLAs due to their proximity to their locale and to the community tend to play a greater political role to constituents. State councils play a menial role in state politics; the council only acts as an advisory committee and can, at most, delay the passage of a bill (Thakur 1995: 155).

Gujarat in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha has 26 seats and 11 seats, respectively. Of the 26 seats, one seat represents the Kheda district. Each district in Gujarat is represented in the State Assembly which has 182 seats; seven of the seats are allotted to the Kheda district.

Parallel to the state government system is the *panchayat* system. The Kheda district has thirteen *talukas* that include: Nadiad, Matar, Thasra, Kathlal, etc. The elected presidents of a set number of villages make up the taluka panchayat. The duties of the *Taluka Panchayat* are:

supervising the village panchayats, appoint guardians who assist villages in times of emergencies, run and oversee taluka cooperative banks, organize inter-village tournaments, and keep inter-village roads in good condition. Above the taluka panchayat are the *district panchayats* that are made up of the presidents of the taluka panchayats. The main function of the district panchayat is to oversee the activities of the taluka panchayat and audit the accounts. The term length for both taluka and district panchayat presidents is three years. Below the taluka panchayat are the *gram panchayats*, which is the panchayat body that is at the village level. The gram panchayat is made up of five council members with one head given the title *Sar Panch* or *Pramukh*. In Gujarat, there are 26 district panchayats, 224 taluka panchayats, and 13,693 gram panchayats (Panchayat Department 2009).

Gujarat's Political Scene

Sonia Gandhi represented as Mata Durga (a Hindu goddess); yester-years actor Raj Babbar grinning alongside twelve of his Congress compatriots in Agra; Karunaidhi wearing his trademark sunglasses and gazing into a painted yellow sun; Mayawati with raised hands blessing the city of Lucknow, and Rahul Gandhi clad in clearly photo-shopped *dulhe sehra*²⁵—these were the images on political posters that I saw lining every wall, roadside, and gully in India. I remember while driving to Karol Bagh from the Delhi Airport and it seemed as if every poster was saffron, white, and green, the colors of the Indian flag, with the candidate surrounded by the coterie of Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi, and of course, complete with a large palm²⁶ in the center with the words Indian National Congress (INC)

²⁵ Dulhe sehra is the traditional attire for Indian males;; it consists of a white embroidered kameez (long tunic), dhoti (unstitched cloth wrapped around the legs), and a red turban.

²⁶ The symbol for the Indian National Congress is the palm of a hand.

underneath. Yet, once in Gujarat the ubiquitous Congress palm was replaced with an orange lotus: the emblem of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Rang de Basanti (Painting it Saffron)

Gujarat was officially separated from Maharashtra in 1960s. Like Maharashtra, Gujarat politics was dominated by the Congress Party from Independence until early 1990s, when the BJP, the “Saffron Party”, emerged in the political scene as a formidable opponent. With the ruling of the Mandal Commission²⁷, the Babri Masjid demolition and subsequent strengthening of Hindutva ideology amongst the Hindu Belt²⁸, and allegations of corruptions against Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, Congress was fighting an uphill battle to remain in power.

In 1995, the BJP started their successful campaign in Gujarat. Though raising numerous socio-economic issues, the BJP narrowed in on two key points: the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya²⁹ and Hindutva principles and the increased inflation and corruption under Congress (Shah 1999: 257). To fuel the campaign, the BJP emphasized the vanishing Hindu culture and traditions in modern Gujarat and evoked the rhetoric and need of national Hindu pride. Coupling Hindu solidarity with fiery slogans such as *bhay, bhook mukta* (free from fear, hunger, and corruption), the BJP started to garner immense political clout in Gujarat (Shah 1999: 259).

Congress candidates countered BJP political ideologies with allegations of communalism, but

²⁷ The Mandal Commission was a report prepared under the discretion of B.P. Mandal addressed the position and condition of lower caste members. The Indian government refers to citizens of lower caste backgrounds as Other Backward Classes (OBC). The Mandal Commission created reservations for scheduled castes and tribes. The reservations apply to all government services and institutions (Aggarwal and Agrawal 1991: 43-47)

²⁸ The Hindu belt refers to the states: Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh (Arora 2009).

²⁹ In 1992, the Babri Masjid was destroyed by Hindus during a political rally led by the BJP. The Babri Masjid, according to certain Hindus was built on the ground of the Ram Mandir. Ayodhya, the location of the Babri Masjid, is thought to be the birthplace of Lord Ram (Ayodhya Dispute History 2010).

Congress's appeal to the public to vote against communalism was met with deaf ears especially as it came from candidates and leaders who were known to be corrupt and self-serving (Shah 1999: 258). Unsurprisingly, the BJP emerged victorious in polls. In the 1991 Tenth Lok Sabha elections, BJP secured 20 out of 26 seats from Gujarat and then in the 1995 Vidhan Sabha elections, the BJP won 122 out of 182 seats in the State Assembly (Shah 1999: 259).

The victory of the BJP in Gujarat also led to much internal party conflict as there were three candidates for the Chief Minister post. Two candidates, Shankarsinh Vaghela and Kashiram Rana were from backward castes, while the third candidate, Keshubahi Patel, was of the Leva Patidar caste. With the support of the main leaders of the RSS and L.K. Advani, Patel came to power in March 1995 much to the dismay of Vaghela and Rana. For party solidarity, Narendra Modi, a chief BJP strategist, aimed to marginalize supporters of Vaghela and Rana. In retaliation, Vaghela along with the support of 47 other MLAs started a dramatic revolt against Patel and sought to remove him from office, but instead he gained the fury of the RSS and BJP who publicly condemned his actions and demanded the expulsion of Vaghela on the grounds of breaching party discipline (Shah 1999: 263-4).

The estrangement of Vaghela ignited tensions between the Patidar and the Rajput³⁰ community, an old political rivalry. The supporters of Patel saw Vaghela's uprising as an anti-Patidar conspiracy, while news of Rana's expulsion solidified the Rajput community's claims of Patidar political dominance (Shah 1999: 263). With tensions running high, Patel resigned as chief minister and Suresh Mehta, a compromise candidate, was sworn in as chief minister. However, a political crisis soon ensued and agitated the political landscape of Gujarat.

³⁰ Rajputs are considered to be in the Kshatriya varna.

After losing a tough election from the Godhra constituency for the Lok Sabha in 1996, Vaghela formed his own party: the Rashtriya Janata Party (RJP). Forming a coalition with the Congress Party, they were able to destabilize the strongly rooted BJP. Mehta was removed as chief minister, and Vaghela assumed the post (Shah 1999: 264). Within a year, Vaghela stepped down due to pressure from the Congress Party to make way for Dilip Parikh, a candidate of the Congress's choice (Rajamani 2000: 190). However, the Congress-RJP alliance started to crumble; the RJP refused to allow Congress to set the terms on seat-sharing for the upcoming Lok Sabha and assembly elections. Vaghela, still the RJP leader called for Congress to disregard the seat-sharing agreement or they would formally break the alliance and contest the elections without Congress support. With the Congress Party refusing to compromise, CM Parikh with the guidance of Vaghela, submitted a formal request to the governor to dissolve the Legislative Assembly surprising the Congress and especially the BJP as it held the majority in the house (BJP stakes claim in Gujarat, 1997). A week after submitting the formal request, CM Parikh resigned on undisclosed moral ground and pressure from the BJP and Congress. The resignation forced the State to hold the Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections at the same time (Gujarat Chief Minister Dilip Parikh Quits, 1998). Modi was called upon from Chandigarh by party leaders to head the BJP campaign. With an aggressive campaign strategy designed by Modi, BJP swept the elections and relegated the RJP to the sidelines. In March 1998, Keshubhai Patel regained the position of chief minister (Shah 1999: 264). In a period of five years, Gujarat was marked with political chaos and had seen four different chief ministers, the emergence of a new political party, and the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly.

Meanwhile, Modi was gaining popularity within the BJP. After directing the BJP to victory in the Gujarat and Himanchal Pradesh polls, Modi was conferred as the party's general secretary and was garnering much support from top party officials. In 2001, after the BJP lost in two state by-elections, Patel was officially removed as Chief Minister and Modi was instated into office. In 2002 and 2007, Modi was re-elected as Chief Minister.

The 2002 election was particularly noteworthy as it also was the year of the Godhra riots. An attack on a train in Godhra carrying Hindu volunteers sparked communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. More than 1,000 Muslims were killed in the week-long riots. Opponents placed Modi at the center of the embroiling disturbance as they claim he instigated Hindu mobs and did not employ police forces to contain the violence. In spite of the controversy surrounding Modi, he was re-elected to the chief minister post and able to lead the BJP to victory, in which they secured 127 state assembly seats, by using radical Hinduism as a platform. Incidentally, the areas most affected by communal violence were the BJP's biggest gains (Profile: Narendra Modi 2007).

Currently, Gujarat politics is dominated by the BJP and is commonly referred to in the media as the BJP fortress. As of 2007, The BJP controls 117 out of the 182 state assembly seats. The Kheda district is no exception. Of the seven seats allotted to the Kheda district, six of the seats are occupied by the BJP and one by the INC (Gujarat Online 2009).

The Golden Ticket

It was my first interview and it was with a former MLA from BJP and the current Pramukh. Fifteen minutes after we started the interview there was a knock on the door and three men entered without hesitation. Unsure and confused of whom these men were, I asked Mr. Reddy if I should just step outside for a moment. “No, no, sit.” The men happened to be the trustees of the local hospital. The hospital bought two new expensive machines, an X-ray and MRI machine. The current director of the hospital was not pulling his weight according to a man sitting at the end of the sofa. The hospital bought these machines for a few lakhs (a few thousand dollars) and only a handful of patients have used the machines. Nice, I thought, they care about utilization and patient care.

The man in the middle quickly said, “Reddy ji, do something, we paid for these machines and this director keeps telling doctors to do as few as tests as possible. At this rate, we will never pay off the machines.” The man at the end, again, entered into the conversation, “Instead of him, my nephew would be better. He understands this stuff more. We can’t keep this useless director. We need to remove him.”

“How will we remove him?” said the man in the middle.

“Don’t worry we will talk to the board before the next meeting and we will dismiss him, end of matter” said Mr. Reddy. Everyone bid their farewells with God’s name and I just sat awkwardly.

“You’re going to dismiss the director just because he tries to keep utilization low, that’s actually a good thing. Overutilization is one of the biggest issues with healthcare today; I know this from all my graduate courses in healthcare administration,” I said.

“He is a nice guy, but we bought the machines for the people and they should use them.”

“Even if they don’t need them and it will place a financial burden on them” I quickly added.

“Well at least they will be healthy,” he said pragmatically.

Sensing my words did not make the even the slightest difference I went back to our conversation before the unforeseen interruption. “So we were talking about NREGA³¹ and corruption...”

“As I said before the entire system is corrupt. You see, political parties have expectations. A politician or candidate can start out with very noble intentions that he will get clean water, start local education programs, provide jobs, whatever, but he can’t always do that,” he stated unequivocally.

“What do you mean?” – I asked.

“The party can choose from so many people to give a ticket to, but they chose you. The party has expectations that just as they helped you, you will help them. It is funny, when a candidate first starts out he says “I will do this for you” and after he is elected he will say, ‘I had to do this...for the party.’”

³¹ NREGA refers to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which guarantees 100 days of work to unskilled laborers. Potential workers have to register with the Gram Panchayat; work must be provided within fifteen days of application, if work is not given, the worker receives a predetermined daily allowance. Workers receive 100 rupees for each day of work. In recent times, the NREGA program has been severely criticized due to corrupt practices at the village level (Mehrotra 2008).

“So there is the obligation just because the party gave him the ticket to run,” I replied.

“Do you know how expensive an election is? The regular person cannot imagine. You know...not anyone can just run. To run for MLA, it is 50 lakhs (\approx \$ 125,000) minimum and that too for a very small constituency and if you want to run for Lok Sabha...no less than two crore (\approx \$430,000). Can you imagine crores? The party helps raise this money and they invest this money in you, they need to get it back right? For the next election or for their other projects, corruption almost becomes necessary. On a government salary, nobody can come up with 50 lakhs.”

Getting Elected in Gujarat

Gaining the party’s backing and adequate resources to run for office is not a simple task. First, obtaining a ticket in India is a competitive affair; one commonly hears stories of flagrant sycophancy in the hope of getting the party’s backing to run for office. Second, most people in a constituency do not have the financial means to run for office and those that do have the financial resources do not have the public support. To have both, one needs to understand the system: the system of politics and elections in Gujarat.

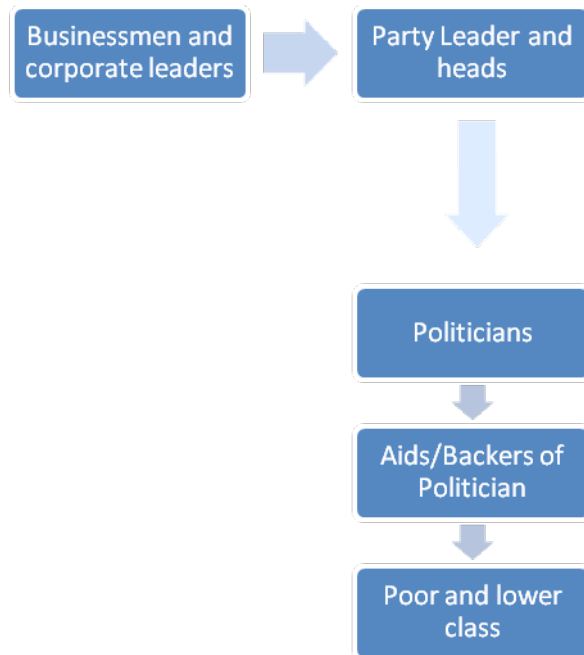


Figure 2. Graphical Representation of Gujarat Politics (Derived from notes and interviews with politicians, party workers, and corporators).

At the top of the system is the party leader, Narendra Modi, who is not only the Chief Minister, but also the Party Leader, the USP of the BJP in Gujarat, and former general secretary and campaign strategist. Modi, though heavily criticized by the Left for his role in the Godhra Riots of 2002, is championed by businessmen and the common man for the growth of Gujarat's economy. In fact before Modi became CM, Gujarat's economy decreased by five percent, but within ten years he has clocked in the state's GDP at eleven percent. Gujarat is now the home to company plants such as Tata Motors, Bombardier, Hitachi, and dozens of other foreign and domestic businesses (Timmons 2011). With the rapid industrialization of Gujarat coupled with

the ease of conducting business, it is not surprising that many industrialists support a state led by Modi.

Corporations and businesses play a strong role in politics from the sidelines. Mr. Ganesh and Mr. Sawan, two leading industrialists in the infrastructure and steel industries, respectively, regarded the BJP-led government of Gujarat highly, as the success of their business relied on the development projects and schemes led by the government. Mr. Ganesh openly admitted to me during an interview that he had pledged 10 crore (\approx \$2.2 million), while Mr. Sawan admitted to pledging 20 crore (\$4.4 million) to the party. The money is pooled together and divided and distributed to individual campaigns based on the candidate and constituency.

The candidate chosen by the party leaders and heads is based on the constituency and often patronage. In the 2007 Vidhan Sabha election for the Nadiad Constituency, the candidates chosen by the BJP and INC were from the Leva Patidar community, the BSP candidate was Muslim, and of the two independent candidates one was a Patidar and the other was Muslim. The BJP candidate won with 63,310 votes, which was 13,360 more votes than the next leading candidate from the Congress Party, while the other three candidates only received roughly 5,000 votes in total (Indian Election Affairs 2007).

In State Assembly elections, candidates are given the ticket based on caste, stature in the community, and proximity to higher leaders. In the case of the Nadiad constituency, the ticket is generally given to a candidate of the Patidar caste. The Patidar caste is not numerically dominant in the region, and is outnumbered by Kolis and Dalits, but they are economically and politically the dominating caste. The Patidar own the largest share of land as well as control

small and large industries such as the Amul Dairy and oil mills and sectors like education and diamond trade in the Kheda region as mentioned in Chapter 1. The economic dominance of key industries and property has permitted the Patidar to control and restrict access to various resources and enabled them to become a political force. In the 2007 State Assembly, the Patidar occupy 32 of the 182 seats, or about 18 percent of the house (Langa 2007). The Patidar identity and presence in politics has historically been strong and significant in Nadiad as it was the birthplace and home of Sardar Vallabhai Patel and the MLA position since 1970 has been occupied by a Patidar.

Apart from choosing a Patidar, the party has to choose a candidate that has strong community ties. As there are many Patidar candidates to choose from, for both the BJP and INC, the party has to consider the influence and ties the candidate has to the community. Finally, patronage and connections to party leaders plays a tremendous role. In a recent interview with Robert Vadra, the husband of Priyanka Gandhi of the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty, revealed the insistence from top party members to run from the Sultanpur constituency in the 2009 elections and he openly stated that he can win from anywhere due to his name (Sinha and Jerath 2010). Political dynasties, famous surnames, and political patronage aid in ticket distribution. The BJP candidate in Nadiad and current MLA is known for his camaraderie with party leaders and proximity to Modi.

The amount allotted to each candidate from party funds is established on criteria such as incumbency, constituency size and demographics. An incumbent candidate running again has already built a connection with voters, therefore, is harder to defeat. A party running an

incumbent candidate with a positive standing can invest less in a campaign as compared to a party running a new candidate.

The history and size of the constituency are also crucial. Running for MLA from a town is very different from running from a rural constituency. With fewer people and strong figures already part of community life, in a rural constituency parties will choose candidates that have an established reputation amongst the locals. In a town or city, campaigns become more competitive. With numerous affluent individuals and candidates running from the same caste, the primary vote bank becomes fractured and candidates have to rely on the votes of the lower caste. With the low caste comprising over fifty percent of Gujarat's population, the lower castes become politically important. In Nadiad, the Dalits make up about a third of the entire population and controlling such a large pool of votes becomes challenging but necessary.

Analyzing the past three Vidhan Sabha elections, it is hard to understand how Patidar candidates won when the Patidar caste, though dominant in the town, constitutes only fifteen percent or less of the population. Even more puzzling was how lower caste candidates allied with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) party never managed to receive more than 2,000 votes.

According to Mr. Patel, a party head, it simply came down to money. Campaign finances not only included money for posters, publicity, transportation, and cost for public venues, but also for funding the lower class. As he clarified, the funds for the lower class did not support clinics, welfare programs, or given to charity, they were given directly to impoverished Dalits in exchange for the allegiance of their vote. The process of giving money for votes was rather systematic.

Although the practice of vote-buying in Western cultures is deemed corrupt and illegitimate, it is an accepted practice in South and Southeast Asia. In such areas, the local politics is colored with a history of feudal structures and institutions and patron-client relationships are well-entrenched in the culture and customs of the society (Meisburger 2007). Structural and cultural elements along with socioeconomic factors of a region enable the cultivation of a political arena, in which paying for a vote is not only acceptable, but also the norm. In such areas, patron-client networks can be utilized for systematic money distribution and vote buying (Hicken 53-5).

The jajmani system³² in Indian town and villages has been able to endure due to economic inequalities and the personal nature of patronage relationships. In times of a jajmani economy, patrons frequently gave gifts such as clothes, food, or trousseaux³³ to clients (kameen); the gift given partly from the patron's (jajman) generosity also functioned as a symbol of the ties that connect the patron and the client. In essence, the exchange signified the offering of the client's loyalty, duty, and work for the patron's economic and social support³⁴ (Meisburger 2007). In the modern economy and political system, the system of patronage starts to change. After independence, clients were still linked to their patrons but now they had a crucial resource: a vote. As clients have little political power and few resources, the vote permits the client to exchange his loyalty for other benefits such as, in this case, money (Corstange 2010: 4).

³² The jajmani system is the patron-client system in India (Refer to Literature Review and Chapter 1)

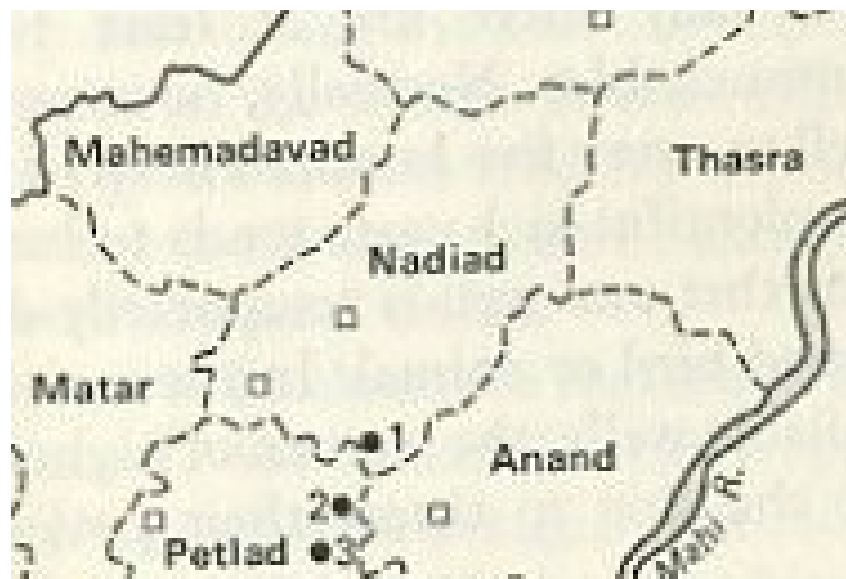
³³ Trousseaux are wedding gifts that are sent from the bride's side to the groom.

³⁴ Social support such as patrons will help finance education of the client's children, help pay for weddings, etc.

Elections in Nadiad act as a reflection of this described modern clientelism. With a history of caste dominance and feudal institutions and large economic and social divisions between the upper and lower classes, a system of paying for votes has been able to flourish in the town.

Money Allocation: The System at Work in Nadiad

The constituency of Nadiad (Refer to Figure 3) is quite large. With a population of 196,793 people [Census of India 2001], the money cannot be distributed to each person as the cost would be exceedingly high. To estimate vote totals, campaign strategists and party officials divide Nadiad into various *vasti*, or communities. Classes in Nadiad, typically, reside in specific geographic locations³⁵. Estimates and voting patterns are derived by strategists by how an entire *vasti* will vote.



³⁵ Practice of class and race segregation in communities is a well-studied and highlighted topic in academia. For example, in a study exploring the issue of race and area of residence in Chicago found that African Americans were relegated to the Southside of Chicago and in areas such as Hyde Park, Oakwood, and Kenwood. White Americans resided along Lake Michigan and many moved to nearby suburbs (Biles 1998: 31-34). In Nadiad, the poor communities are concentrated in areas of west Nadiad. Areas such as Anand and Petlad are considered by natives to be richer (Interview notes).

Figure 3. Map of Nadiad Constituency. (Pocock 1972: 7)

In areas such as Desaivago or Patelwadi, where many of the candidates and Patidar reside, money is not distributed in these areas as Patidar will vote for other Patidar. Though both candidates from the INC and BJP are Patidar, the BJP tends to secure a greater number of votes from the Patidar community. The Patidar support remains with the BJP due to Congress's KHAM strategy³⁶ and economic development under the BJP. Congress's support of Vaghela and then Parikh over Patel, met with much disapproval from the Patidar. An even larger factor for the people, however, is the development of Gujarat under the Modi government. The Patidar, the primary business-owners and agriculturalists, in the area have greatly benefitted from development schemes initiated by the BJP.

Other areas such as Kochatvago, Kakarkhad, Lakhawad, and Pij Bhagor are occupied by the Rajput, Brahmin, and Muslim population. The Brahmin vote typically goes to the BJP party, but they constitute a small percentage of the population. In the past, the Brahmin were allied aligned with the Congress, but the Hindutva³⁷ platform of the BJP has been able to summon support of the Brahmin. The Muslim vote, a group that is significant in the Nadiad Township at about 10-12 percent, is difficult for BJP to capture due to their Hindutva platform and the collective memory of the Godhra riots . The Rajput caste since the onset of the KHAM strategy

³⁶ Alliance of Kshatriya, Harijan (Dalit), Adivasi, and Muslim; Refer to Chapter 1

³⁷ V.D. Sarvarkar coined the term Hindutva ("Hinduness") in his book, *Hindutva: Who is Hindu?*. In the book he attempts to define who is Hindu and what exactly is Hindutva. He categorizes Hindus as those that consider Hindustan (India) as the motherland and are descendants of Hindu parents. Sarvarkar correlated Hindutva to nationalism and used the term to describe a national identity (Sharma 2002: 21-2). However, the national identity is limited; as noted by Sarvarkar, the Hindu nationality applies to those who follow Indian religions such as: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism (Sharma 2002: 23). The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), a community and political organization, promotes a fundamental Hindutva ideology. They have limited entrance to Muslims and Christians and have become more militant. The BJP, the political affiliate of the RSS, propogates the core Hindu nationalist principles of the RSS; however, it is less conservative and militant than the RSS (Hansen 1999: 133).

has been aligned with the Congress Party, yet recently, the alliance has started to deteriorate. The alliance started to crumble after Vaghela, a Rajput, was forcibly removed from the chief minister post by Congress. After the dissolution of the RJP-Congress coalition, the Congress has had greater difficulty securing Rajput votes.

The Vaghri Basti and Dhed Basti are inhabited by the two lower castes. Parties target the lower caste as they are fractionalized and their votes can easily be bought. Within the low caste there are numerous divisions known as jati and each jati compares its social status with the other. The inability of the low caste to engage in caste solidarity stems from the jajman-kameen patronage system. As Gould asserts:

“...the jajmani system was an expression of the extremely hierarchal character of the caste structure. The element of patronage, on the other hand, cut through the horizontal stratification of the village community. If the dominant caste was internally divided and did not form a closed front, it was equally difficult for the kamins, even if they belonged to the same caste, to take a stand. The hierarchical social structure was split up into blocks of patrons with their clients” (Breman 1974: 19).

Though the Patidar suffer internal conflict and are fiercely hierarchal, they exhibit extreme community solidarity and mobilization (Pocock 1972: 65-7). While the patrons, the Patidar, of the jajmani system were able to unify, the clients, the lower caste, were divided on too many fronts, along Patron divisions as well as jati differences. Due to all the differences, running a low caste candidate in a constituency with Patidar caste dominance is risky for political parties and has prevented the emergence of a formidable low-caste candidate, but with the lack of a candidate from their community and no political allegiance, the low castes form a vital vote bank.

Political parties provide funds to pay each able voting-eligible low caste constituent up to Rs. 1000. Distributing about a thousand rupees to 60,000 – 65,000 people can be expensive and prove to be troublesome especially if the constituent takes money from both parties, does not cast a vote, or casts a vote for a different candidate³⁸. To guarantee a greater return of votes, money is not directly distributed from the candidate to the people.

From the candidate, money is distributed among aids and supporters who in turn take a cut and ensure the candidate that they will receive certain number of votes. For example, if a candidate gives a tobacco farm owner Rs. 50,000, the owner would have to guarantee at least forty to fifty votes. The owner would be allowed to skim off a portion of the money given by the candidate or be promised resources or contracts once the candidate is in office.

Candidates distribute the funds based on the strength and coterie of the supporter. As the supporter has to be able to guarantee a baseline number of votes, their supporter needs to already have significant local ties and power i.e. a patron. In Nadiad, funds are frequently distributed to Patels who own farms, stores, and businesses as they have financial power, influence in the community, and are often the employers of low caste workers. If a worker is given Rs. 1000 from the fund and the supporter discovers a vote cast for the other party, the consequences could be dire. As the supporter provides the income to the low caste member, most will not retaliate. When there is foreseeable retaliation, politicians and candidates will use

³⁸ The figure of 60,000-65,000 was attained by interviews and calculations consistent with Nadiad demographics. Nadiad has a population of 200,000, of which half fall under the classification of scheduled classes. Not all scheduled classes are considered to be Dalits. Locals and party officials estimate that Dalits are thirty percent of the Population.

Note: Caste census is not available in India as of 1931. The first caste census since 1931 is scheduled for 2011.

the assistance of goonda³⁹, or criminals. Goonda are often used by politicians as they already have cultivated an intimidating and frightening image. According to Berenschot, goonda and politicians have fostered a mutual relationship, as both have much to gain from the other. Goonda, in exchange for protection from police intervention, will help the politician collect monetary contributions for campaigns and uphold the reputation of the politician in the locality (Berenschot 2008: 5-8).

Dependence of clients on the patron as well as threats from local goonda along with the lack of a formidable low caste candidate compels the low caste Vaghri and Dhed voters to accept money and vote as instructed by the Patidar.

The System: A Reflection

“Any last minute questions?” Mr. Reddy asked. I glanced at the clock; it was almost the end of my appointment.

“You said there was some acceptance to corrupt practices, but I have talked to some of the villagers and they appear to be angered and exasperated...”

“So you are going to ask me why corruption still happens...why there are still corrupt politicians..why the poor villagers keep voting for the same people. The truth is there is a difference with accepting it and being used to it. Everywhere you go, you hear about corruption, this is not a new phenomenon...the people may not like what is happening or the

³⁹ Goonda are local goons; they have cultivated an intimidating image by engaging in violent behavior, having multiple infractions against the law, and creating close relationships with top officials (Berenschot 2008: 5-8).

corruption that they have to deal with but is anybody surprised when a new scandal comes up? No...they expect it.”

“Just because they expect it, they let it go?” I asked.

“Yes, the poor do suffer, but no one is innocent. In India, politics is different. In India the election is not between a couple of parties and several key issues. In India there is caste politics, communal politics, religion in politics, and coalition politics. People don’t vote for the best candidate, they vote for communities. For example, there may be a good guy who wants to help the poor, but the poor will overlook him and vote for someone who is from their community. The other person might very well be corrupt, but they still do.”

Undoubtedly, caste, communal, and coalition politics play a large role in elections, but in Nadiad, clientelist politics is also at work. According to Robinson and Verdier, clientelist politics develop in areas characterized by high inequality, hierarchal social relations, and low productivity (Wantchekon 2003: 400). In Nadiad with a deeply rooted caste system and dominance by the Patidar caste, social inequalities between the Patidar and the Dalits have been firmly entrenched with the Patidar at the top of the hierarchy and the Dalits at the bottom. Moreover, established patron-client networks and a history of gift giving that provides patrons loyalty and services from the client in exchange for security has made it conducive to shift to a system of vote buying.

Yet the acceptance of vote-buying practices results in high election costs that are largely financed by political parties. In a report by the Centre for Media Studies, a think tank, estimated that Rs. 10,000 crore (about \$2 billion) would be spent on the 2009 Lok Sabha elections; both

the Congress and BJP on average spent Rs. 20 million per candidate for the Lok Sabha elections. Of the Rs. 10,000 crore-budget, about Rs. 2,500 crore (25 percent) is predicted to be spent on unofficial cash transactions or direct payment to voters (Lok Sabha polls to cost more than the US presidential poll, 2009).

The high cost of running for an election due to vote-payments leads politicians to be reliant upon political parties to fund their campaign and that dependency leads to an obligation—a duty to pay back the party. The duty manifests itself in the political system as corruption because as Mr. Reddy stated in the beginning of the interview, “On a government salary, nobody can come up with 50 lakhs.”

-Chapter 3-

The Participants of the System

It costs Rs. 25 lakhs (\$63,000) to reserve a seat at a graduate college, two crore for medical schools to receive approval and proper certification to teach and churn out new doctors (Big scam: CBI unravels web of MCI corruption 2010), a few thousand rupees to ensure electricity, and only Rs. 3000 (\$65) to obtain a state-issued driver’s license (Philip 2010). Bribery and corruption occurs at every level and affects a wide range of people. The corruption in the system is experienced in very different ways by the elite, the middle-class, the lower class and

the poor, and of course, politicians. Each of these perspectives is important in understanding the perpetuation of corruption.

The Elite

I was waiting in my car across the Ashopalav Plaza, an upscale shopping complex in Satellite, Ahmedabad, a nice part of the city for Mr. Ganesh, the CEO of an infrastructure company. I expected to meet him in a posh office or an upscale coffee shop for the interview, not the side of a road. After what felt like ages under the hot sun, his car finally pulled up next to mine. He apologized for the inconvenient location and timing but he quickly explained that Bhaishree, a famous kathakaar, will join us and we will take him to the airport. With a smile he added, "Aren't you lucky, it's your first time in India and you will meet one of the most revered men in the country?"

On one hand I was thrilled by my luck and on the other, it meant that I would have less time to speak with Mr. Gautam and if I was going to get answers, I needed to start immediately. I asked about his business, potential encounters with politicians, and then I started asking about contracts.

"I knew you were going to ask about this, your uncle explained your project to me. Let me guess, when you think about corruption you completely assume it is bad right? Most people see it that way...either black or white. Let me ask you something. If you are raising a plant, what do you need to give it to grow?"

Surprised by the odd question, I hesitantly replied, "I suppose water and sunlight."

“Right and what about if you want to make that plant grow faster, then what do you give the plant?” he asked.

“Umm..fertilizer”

“That’s your answer. Corruption is the fertilizer. As a businessman, all of my projects—whether it is building a road, a bridge, or a skyscraper—each of these are like my plants. I can give it everything it needs to grow like the right project managers, money from investors, and labor workers, but without fertilizer my projects will be stuck...some of them won’t even get off the ground.”

“So without paying a few bribes, your company cannot start any of the projects?”

“Of course not, we are an infrastructure company. For everything that we build, we need a permit. If we do not pay some people here and there, our request for a permit will be ‘lost in the files’ and even after all the hard work put into gaining a contract, nothing can be done. A little money goes a long way.”

A file conveniently getting lost or work being done at a deathly slow pace was not astonishing; it was simply part of the red tape phenomenon. Bureaucratic red tape and the difficulty of conducting business is not a secret; according to a survey by Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC), when foreign business executives were asked to rank the bureaucratic efficiency of twelve Asian countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, and Malaysia, India ranked the lowest (Hyslop 2010). Moreover, India ranked 75th out of 127 countries, for best countries

to conduct business in 2009, eleven spots lower than in 2008 due to increased corruption, high tax rates, and trade restrictions (Red tape makes India 75th best for business 2009).

Along with dealing managing the bureaucratic red tape, businessmen have to be apt at gaining state contracts, the largest supplier of infrastructural projects, or as Mr. Ganesh put it, “a good business man knows where, when, and with whom to make an ‘investment.’”

“Usually to gain a government contract, like any other contract, you submit your portfolio with your estimate, company standing, and such. It is very competitive because state contracts are very large. In such times, you need to use your connections,” added Mr. Gautam.

In this case, “connections” translated to a political official who could steer the contract into the hands of the company. India has had many scandals regarding bribes in exchange for contracts, illustrated by the Bofors and the Commonwealth Games Scandal. Recently, in a speech in Dehradun, Ratan Tata⁴⁰ openly spoke of the corruption in the system:

“I happened to be on a flight once; a fellow industrialist sitting on the seat next to me said ‘You know, I don’t understand, you people are very stupid. You know the minister wants Rs. 15 crore. Why don’t you just pay, you want the airlines’” (Olson 2010).

For a price of Rs. 15 crore (\$3,255,000), Ratan Tata, the successor of JRD Tata who had created the first commercial airlines for India that was later acquiesced by the Government and converted to Air India, Tata Sons could have re-entered the aviation industry. In the end, Tata refused to pay the Rs. 15 crore. Whereas Tata hesitated, other industrialists were eager to seize the opportunity.

⁴⁰ Ratan Tata is the Chairman of Tata Sons, of India’s largest corporations. He is a leading multi-billionaire industrialists and an influential figure in corporate world. In 2010, Tata was ranked 61 on Forbes Most Powerful People list (Most Powerful People 2010).

“Business is about cost and benefits. Every decision is based on profit—just profit” said Mr. Sawan. “You see, I may have to pay a few crore to this minister or that politician, but there is a bigger picture. You need to look at the future. A contract to build the roads in the city is hundreds of crores, paying a few crore in the beginning is just a small cost that gives way to a big profit.”

“Profits are the bottom line,” I said.

“Well if you are the director of a company, isn’t that your job? But it is not all bad. We pay some and look at the result--development. Everyone benefits from that.”

For the elite class in India that is mainly comprised of industrialists and businessmen, managing the roadblocks, the red tape, the expectations of bureaucrats and politicians in the system is part of their job. The industrialists are clearly aware of their exchanges and do recognize the act as corrupt, but their perception of corruption is different. Corruption is not seen as a black or white issue; instead they see it as a means to accomplish a goal. A bribe to a minister could translate into a large government contract and the lack of a bribe could mean the indefinite delay of a project.

Common discourse from the elite classes highlights the cascading nature of the system. Mr. Ganesh and his friends consistently emphasized the outcome of a project, not the process of attaining a project. According to the industrialist, all development projects yielded a benefit for every class. For example if a contract for a highway was given by the state, the poor would

have a steady income for a period of time as they could be hired for labor and the upper-middle and middle-class will be able to enjoy new roads and routes. A new highway makes travel easier, allow people to commute to jobs, among many other things.

To the elite, corruption was not enveloped by negative connotations. Many see the problems regarding corruption, but they fail to take a stand against corruption and acquiesce to the demands. The tolerance of corruption by the elite classes of India stems from the potential economic benefits of complying with the system. For industrialist in Gujarat, India's most economically dynamic state, corruption is viewed as "fertilizer," a substance one adds to increase growth and productivity.

The Middle Class

Estimates by Forbes, place India's growing middle class at 300 million people (David 2007). Other conservative estimates approximate the middle class population to be roughly 170 million (Faber 2010). Though the estimates vary considerably, it is undeniably one of the largest and fastest growing middle-classes in the world. The middle-class now have multi-room homes, televisions, cell phones, cars, and growing incomes. In an era of globalization and rapid economic growth, the Indian middle-class is being exposed to a life-style that it had previously, even a decade ago, not experienced. The middle-class is particularly intriguing, as they are populous and not socially disadvantaged like the Dalits and tribals. They could potentially be a political force and rise up against corruption, but they have failed to take any stand against it.

As I was driving with my Aunt around Nadiad, I noticed a man on a scooter being pulled over by the police. I thought it was odd as the man had a helmet, he was one of the few that

actually took the precaution, and he definitely was not speeding. Confused and thinking I was unaware of the laws, I turned to my aunt and asked, “What did he do? I don’t think he was speeding.”

“Yea, hmm...well, he will give the police a hundred rupees and they will let him go.”

The incident was not the first; I had encountered the same thing in Jaipur by the puppet colony. My tour bus was pulled over for “speeding” even though we were caught in traffic and flanked by cars on both sides. The professor leading the trip had the same response as my aunt. There was no arguing with the police, the man slightly got up from his seat, pulled out his wallet, gave a note to the police, gave his scooter a kick-start, and drove off. There was a strange sense of complacency amongst the people.

I was sitting in the living room with my Great-Uncle. Unlike many of the other houses I had seen, his was quite simple; there were no large statues of gods and goddesses or movie-poster sized family portraits. There were just two plain sofas and framed pictures of his children and grandchildren scattered on the side tables.

“How did you choose which candidate to vote for?” I asked.

The middle-class Patidar in Nadiad had to choose between two candidates from their caste and unlike the poor, they were not given any financial incentive. I was interested in how they decided which candidate to vote for.

“I choose Desai because he is so helpful.”

“Desai...which one and what had he helped you with?” I asked since both the INC and BJP candidate had the same last name.

“Gotiyo⁴¹...the current one...he helped my daughter get into medical school.”

Mr. JD’s story was quite complicated. His daughter with slightly above average scores was accepted into medical school in a nearby town. However, she wanted to go to medical school in the city, which is more competitive. To help his daughter reach her dream, he approached Mr. D. Patel, the previous MLA and current MP, who helped his daughter get admission into the college of her liking. After she started college, she decided she wanted to be closer to her home and wanted readmission into the school she had rejected. As all the spots were filled and mid-year transfers are extremely rare, the college discarded her request. Again Mr. JD went to Mr. Patel, but this time he refused to get involved. Frustrated, Mr. JD met with Mr. Desai, the MLA, and asked for help. According to Mr. JD, “within a snap of a finger” he opened up a spot at the medical college for his daughter and since that day, his allegiance will always lie with Mr. Desai. This one act secured Mr. Desai five votes, one from Mr. JD and four from his wife and children. Like Mr. JD many other Patidar supported a candidate based on personal experiences and favors rather than merit or ideology. I frequently heard stories of constituents support a candidate because he ordered products from their store, he attended a family prayer, and he supported them during a rough period.

Amongst the Patidar middle class, votes as referred to in Chapter 2 will usually go to other Patidar candidates, then once they narrow in on the Patidar candidates they will vote for

⁴¹ Gotiyo is the nickname of the BJP candidate.

the candidate who they already know, has helped them in the past, and has resources to provide the assistance. Revisiting the case of Mr. JD, he was already well acquainted with the MLA as they lived in the same community, the MLA helped his daughter get into medical school, and the MLA had resources (connections and influence) to provide the favor.

The non-Patidar middle class votes were fractured between the BJP and Congress. However, in recent times, the BJP candidate has been garnering greater support from the non-Patidar middle class. The voting trend, according to the women in my focus groups, was due to the BJP's pro-development stance. As the women described, Nadiad has improved considerably in the last twenty years in terms of infrastructure, jobs, and safety. The roads were more extensive and better; there were more jobs available in the town for both men and women and now women could work late into the night and not have to worry. Many added that they have the ability to go on holidays and send their children to private schools instead of government schools—all luxuries that they have previously not been able to enjoy.

For the middle-class Patidar, the decision of who to vote for is first narrowed down to Patidar candidates as they recognized the benefits and importance of choosing someone from their own caste and then the vote is given to the candidate that the voter is already acquainted with or has been of some help. Like the elite, corruption is not seen as explicitly bad and at times, the corrupt act is not regarded as illegal or wrong instead it was viewed as a 'favor.' The favor leads the voter (the receiver of the favor), and sometimes creates an obligation, to vote for the providing candidate. For the non-Patidar middle class, corruption is acknowledged as a problem within the system, but it is not always considered when making a vote. For the middle

class in Nadiad, economic development and the subsequent lifestyle changes seemed to dominate the voting decision.

The Low Caste and the Poor

“Memsaab, what can I do? I am a simple man. I have a wife, two girls, and one son and I need to make sure that they eat, I can send my children to school, and give them a good life that’s it” said the man. He was my rickshaw driver; it was difficult to talk to the poor as I was incessantly surrounded by family members. I decided to take a pedal rickshaw and paid for the longer route.

“I realize your issues, but corruption makes it worse. The money that is being stolen is supposed to go to people like you. The money you pay for things you are entitled to can be used to pay for your children’s school fee.”

“I am a small man; even if I say something or refuse to give money...nothing will change” he replied. He along with the poor echo a sentiment that is found in every class of India⁴² —‘nothing will change.’ It was the umpteenth time I had heard the phrase, the only difference each time was the way it was said: kuch nahin hoga (in Hindi), kasu nayeen thayye (in Gujarati), and that’s how things are yaar (buddy or friend).

The pessimism of the taxi driver is not unwarranted. A survey conducted by the Centre for Media studies in conjunction with Transparency International suggested that poorer

⁴² Reference: One in two Indians vote for the corrupt 2010 (The Outlook survey was cited in the Literature Review)

constituents faced greater incidences of corruption and bribery; the study also reported finding corruption pervasive at the lowest levels of the government (Dolnick 2008).

Unlike the middle and elite classes who did not clearly perceive corruption as negative; the low caste are well aware of corruption, what constitutes corruption, and the negative effects of corruption on their livelihoods. The women in my focus groups who were from a poorer background openly showed absolute exasperation and disdain of the corruption endemic in the system. The frustration, however, did not manifest in dissidence. The complacency regarding corruption and the continuance of supporting candidates of the dominant caste and not the low caste stem from the votes-for-cash system employed by politicians.

Vote buying system has started to gain immense momentum in recent years. Politicians in various parties such as Karti Chidambaram, M.K. Azhagiri the mayor of Madurai, and MP Assaduddin Owaisi disclosed how their parties distributed money during 2009 Lok Sabha and the 2009 by-election in exchange for support. The Dravida Munnettra Kazhagam (DMK) party paid Rs. 5,000 to each voter in the Thirumangalam constituency and instead of directly giving money to consumers, the DMK inserted envelopes filled with cash into the morning newspaper. Along with the cash, instructions and voting details were provided (Hiddleston 2011). Unlike candidates running in Tamil Nadu, politicians in Nadiad did not pay Rs. 5,000 and they did not arbitrarily distribute money, instead they utilized the help of intermediaries that were directly associated with low caste members such as employers and large agriculturalists as well as

goondas (as described in Chapter 2) so that an obligation is created for members of the lower caste.

At times, the obligation is forced and at other times, it is welcomed. Congress official, S. Kannan, noted that bribes to voters in Thirumangalam were usually Rs. 500 maximum, but in 2009, the rate steeply increased to Rs. 5000 (Hiddleston 2011). The rise in the bribe amount reflects that voters are conscious of selling their vote and the amount changes in response to voter demands. For the poor who live on less than \$1 (Rs. 42) a day, Rs. 1000 rupees is a staggering amount. If one considers two eligible voters per household, during one election period a poor family will receive an amount equivalent to two months of wages in a matter of minutes. Hence it is not surprising that the low caste, though clearly perturbed by corruption, continue to vote for dishonest politicians⁴³.

A unified low caste group under the leadership of a solid candidate could displace the Patidar especially as they are most populous group; however, such an event has not been able to occur in Nadiad. As discussed in Chapter 1, the lack of mobility of the lower castes and subsequent failure to secure influence in the area can be attributed to social inequality arising from the caste system, a system of patronage that allows the patron to exploit the client, and the vote-for-cash system.

The Politicians

⁴³ As described in Chapter 2, the vote-for-cash system is the result of a long history of patronage and the system is a new form of patronage in a democratic not colonized India.

When I started my interviews, I realized I had to be careful especially since I was asking about corruption, a sensitive topic in the current volatile political scene and the incumbent politicians wanted to represent their respective parties as best as possible:

“This would never happen under the bhajap⁴⁴ government. We put development and the people first. Under Modi have you even heard one case of corruption even one? The people voted for Congress and look at what they have given the people in return,” said the BJP MLA.

And expectedly, my conversation with the Congress MP was starkly different.

“The media is overstating the corruption charges. Corruption exists, everyone knows, and this time it is no different. Yes, I regret the corruption scandals of the UPA government but it is not as bad as the media is making it out to be. During the NDA government, there was equal and maybe even more corruption.”

Corruption is a not an isolated practice, both parties have been accused of multiple scandals. When specifically asked about the corruption scandals that occurred from members within their own party, the BJP candidate did not address the issue instead he focused on the lack of action by the Congress Party. The Congress MP on the other hand was unwilling to even slightly condemn the actions of known guilty politicians in his party and reemphasized the media’s role in ‘embellishing’ the scandals and furthermore, like many other higher-up Congress leaders he also underscored the role of coalition politics in corruption.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ In Gujarat, BJP and Bhajap are used interchangeably.

⁴⁵ Coalition politics is a multi-party system in which parties create alliances amongst each other to achieve majority or influence (Bhagat 2004: 7).

In a press meeting in mid-February, Prime Minister Singh in response to persistent questions about A. Raja, former telecom minister, and the 2G scandal, stated that although Raja was chosen by the Congress for the position, there was little that the Congress could do as there were limitations to coalition politics and compromises have to be made while managing allied parties (Yardley 2011). Agreeing with PM Singh, Rahul Gandhi in a press conference in Lucknow defended the name of Congress by pointing to the UPA coalition and not individuals (Price rise, corruption: Rahul Gandhi blames coalition politics 2011).

Incumbent politicians, potential candidates, and party leaders recognize corruption and what is constituted as *brashtyachar* and admit to corruption, but instead of attempting to eliminate it, they displace the blame to other competing parties, the media, and the compulsions of coalition politics.

The Perspectives Reviewed

Each of those groups, the elite, middle-class, poor and low caste, and politicians experience and participate in corrupt activities habitually. The Indian public en bloc conveys exasperation, but the persistence of corruption and the lack of action to combat suggest that there is a certain degree of acceptance. For the elite, corruption is seen as ‘fertilizer’ and is necessary component of economic and business growth. The use of bribes in exchange for contracts explains why post-economic liberalization, corruption has not decreased. Politicians and bureaucrats continue to have rights over key resources (i.e. state contracts) and can hinder project development if industrialists refuse to indulge in demands. Similar to the elite, the middle-class does not completely view corruption negatively. For the middle-class Patidar, an

offering of a gift or help by a Patidar candidate is not regarded as corrupt though the candidate may be offering goods and services that are not legally at his discretion to distribute such as seats in a university. In the case of middle-class non-Patidar constituents, they recognize the corruption but are tolerant as they have been able to enjoy luxuries that they have previously not known. In complete contrast to the elite and middle-class, the poor regard the political system with contempt. They recognize corrupt exchanges but consider themselves helpless due to their economic and social standing. Although a part of their complacency is derived from the socioeconomic status, it also comes from the payment they receive for casting a vote for a running candidate. The politicians, initiators of a corrupt exchange, are fully cognizant of corruption, but when asked about it, they deflect the question and swiftly impugn the media and coalition politics. However as illustrated in Chapter 2, ex-politicians consider corruption a result of high election costs which are financed by the Party.

Conclusion

After returning from India, I again approached my central question: why is political corruption so pervasive in the Indian political system and why do voters continue to vote for known corrupt politicians. As I reflected on the current literature and examined my gathered field notes, interviews, and research, I realized that the answer was not simple and pinning corruption as a result of only culture, bureaucracy, or caste was inadequate. To understand corruption in the political system, it has to be approached holistically. In Nadiad, corruption, the practice and its tolerance, is rooted in the ethno-history of the Patidar, caste dominance, patronage, and campaign finances; each of these factors is highly intertwined with the others.

The current status of the Patidar in Nadiad is the product of a long historical process. The Patidar, who arrived to Gujarat as agriculturalists, have become highly influential in the Kheda district due to their designated duty as revenue collectors and the ownership of land. Under Indian and Mughal monarchs, the Patidar ascended in status due to all the conferred

advantages. During the British Raj, the Patidar were further integrated into the revenue system, and the adoption and institutionalization of the feudal system enabled the Patidar to foster exploitative patron-client relationships. Those very patron-client relationships coupled with the history of exchanging a client's loyalty in exchange for security and goods from the patron has fostered a system of vote-buying. The candidates distribute money to business owners and large agriculturalists (the patrons) who are then responsible for distributing money to low caste voters (clients). The money that the candidates distribute comes from the party. As elections are expensive, candidates have to rely on the party for financing; a large portion of the expense stems from buying votes. Once the money is borrowed, candidates have an obligation to repay the party, which leads to candidates to indulge in corruption once they assume office.

The research provides key insight into the system and why eradicating corruption has been difficult. In the past, administrative reforms have been passed, harsher sentences were enacted to penalize corrupt politicians, decentralization transferred authority from state politicians to village-level panchayat leaders, and information of candidates' background was publicized so voters could make a more informed decision; however, these actions did little to reduce corruption.

Corruption in the Indian political system is akin to the "Gordian Knot"⁴⁶: complicated and intricate. Corruption has numerous intertwined parts like the tangled threads of a knot; simply pulling on one thread does not untie the knot and likewise merely addressing one cause of corruption will not reduce corruption. As in the Tale of Alexander the Great and the Gordian

⁴⁶ The Gordian Knot as legend has it was a highly intricate and complicated knot. According to the tale, anyone who could unfasten the knot would rule Asia. Alexander the great tried to find the ends but could not find the ends of the knot as it was tucked away. He then tried to unravel and pull at the strings but it did not undo the knot. Finally, he took his sword and cut the knot, which finally unraveled it (The Gordian Knot 2008)

knot in which only the bold strike of a sword could cut the knot, such strong bold action is needed to combat corruption. In India, it may be necessary to have action from the bottom or a grassroots movement. As explored in Chapter 3, there is a sense of complacency and tolerance from all the classes, though for different reasons. The people, not only the media, has to make combating corruption a priority and not indulge even if there is a potential benefit such as a new contract, a holiday in Goa, or thousand rupee note.

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