

Parliamentarism, Not Presidentialism

Development and Democracy in India

SANDIPTO DASGUPTA

To opt for a parliamentary over a presidential form of government is arguably the most significant, yet under-analysed, decision made by the Indian constitution-makers. The conventional view is that parliamentarism was an obvious choice given the British colonial inheritance. However, parliamentarism, far from being obvious, was a counter-intuitive choice given the postcolonial agenda of state-led planned development, historically demanding an empowered executive branch most suited to presidentialism. As opposed to the maximalist and plebiscitarian tendencies of presidentialism, parliamentarism was a way to mediate the potentially conflictual cohabitation of mass democracy and planned development.

Arguably one of the most significant choices made by the Indian constitution-makers, in terms of the effects it has had on the subsequent development of the political and institutional life of the country, was to have a parliamentary, as opposed to a presidential, system of government. Yet, this aspect of our constitutional system has received far less scholarly or analytical attention from scholars compared to matters like judicial review, fundamental rights, or even the much later innovation of the basic structure doctrine. On the other hand, it has also been a frequent target of critique. Presidentialism has been offered as a solution to what those critiques view as the fractious dysfunctionality and inefficiency of the Indian political system. This article suggests that the choice of a parliamentary form of government should be viewed as a central piece of the kind of social and political order that the founders of the postcolonial regime sought to institute.

Rather than abstract institutional analysis, one needs to situate parliamentary democracy within the concrete historical context of the postcolonial sociopolitical vision. It was a crucial mediating institutional mechanism for the two most significant, and potentially destabilising, elements of that new order: deliberate state-led socio-economic transformation (often referred to in contemporaneous parlance as planned development), and mass democracy with a universal adult franchise. Analysing the choice of parliamentary government on these terms helps us situate parliament as the mediating terrain whereby developmentalism and democracy could facilitate and stabilise each other.

This, it should be clarified, is not an article that is making a causal claim. That is, it does not marshal archival findings to make definitive claims regarding the true “motives” or “intentions” of the constitution-makers regarding parliamentarism. Rather, the goal is to situate the choice of parliamentarism within the context of the larger project of transition from a colonial to a postcolonial regime, and suggest an analytical framework that could provide insights on the significance of the choice of a parliamentary rather than a presidential form of democracy.

Legacy of British Rule?

To have a parliamentary system of government was one of the first major decisions taken by the Indian constitution-makers regarding the nascent order they were charged with shaping. In one of the early joint meetings of the Union and Provincial Constitution Committees, in June 1947, the decision was taken that “it would suit the conditions of this country better to adopt a parliamentary system of Constitution, the British type of

Sandipto Dasgupta (sandipto.dasgupta@gmail.com) teaches political science at Ashoka University, Sonapat, Haryana.

Constitution, with which we are familiar” (Patel 1947). The last part of the statement suggests the reason for this decision, making it sound seemingly obvious that the Indians decided to go with the system they knew best, the one practised by the colonial rulers whom they were replacing. The simplicity of this explanation—an analytically trivial accident of history—is perhaps why that decision remains curiously under-analysed despite its centrality to the country’s constitutional and political life.

It is indeed true that most postcolonial countries, at least initially, adopted the institutions of their former colonial rulers (Przeworski 2010: 64), though many former British colonies in Africa would later shift from a parliamentary to a presidential system. Indeed, it would be hard to deny that the example of the British system did provide a blueprint for the Indian constitution-makers. There was to be a President in India as a constitutional head of state, but, just like the British monarch, they would be bound to act on the advice of the cabinet. They would not have any say in the selection of the cabinet. Rather, the cabinet had to enjoy the support of the majority of the parliament at all times.

But, a simple story of institutional mimicry is complicated by the fact that, for many of the constitution-makers and Congress leaders, if British colonialism did indeed inspire the adoption of a parliamentary system of government, it was from an aspiration of breaking from it rather than mere affinity for the British form of government. Whatever hallowed place the parliament and legislatures occupied in the British constitutional imagination, the colonial government was a model of unfettered executive authority. The Viceroys enjoyed immense, nearly autocratic, power, and the functionaries of the Indian Civil Service—the famed steel frame of the empire as Lloyd George called them—were the face of the colonial government for most Indians for all practical purposes (Burra 2010). Even reformed late-colonial legislative bodies were powerless in both *de facto* and *de jure* terms.

The notion of “familiarity,” supposed to explain why Indians adopted the parliamentary form of their colonial tutors, is complicated by the fact that at a practical level most of the Indian elites were acquainted with this distinctly anti-parliamentary, anti-legislature, state form. Indeed, those amongst the constitution-makers who were the most experienced in the matters of the state, gained such experience through either the executive branch as civil servants (N G Ayyangar, or B N Rau who, though not a member of the Constituent Assembly, was one of the most influential persons involved in the making of the Constitution), or ministers (G B Pant or K M Munshi), or through the judicial branch as successful lawyers (A K Ayyar). It was this familiarity that explained some of the continuities that the postcolonial regime shared with its colonial predecessor, including the fact that the Constitution borrowed heavily from the Government of India Act, 1935.

Parliamentarism, on the other hand, was a break from the putative “constitutional” structure of colonial rule. And, nationalist leaders, during the last decades before independence, explicitly framed it as such. Their consistent demand during the negotiations—all unsuccessful, to different degrees—over the series of Government of India Acts had been to demand an executive that was accountable to the legislature. Seen from this angle, the simple and, therefore, analytically trivial, explanation of

parliamentarism as an expected legacy of British colonialism becomes more complicated. While the influence of the British constitutional system as an exemplary model in the minds of the Indian nationalist leaders should not be discounted, moving beyond the simplicity of the mimicry argument helps us focus on the other—and far more significant—aspect of the choice made by the those tasked with building a postcolonial regime.

Planned Social Transformation

To understand that aspect, we need to first acknowledge that the constitution-makers were not operating with a *tabula rasa*, choosing a parliamentary against presidential form on the basis of some abstract principles or comparing their theoretical merits or demerits. Their decision was situated within a historically specific set of challenges that confronted the founders of the postcolonial Indian regime. For the purpose of the topic that concerns us in this article, the two central themes of that problematic were state-led socio-economic transformation and mass democracy.

Decolonisation was not merely a political, but also an economic question. From the late 19th century, colonialism was viewed in the nationalist circles as not only robbing Indians of political self-determination, but as actively impeding the development and growth of the Indian economy (Spengler 1971; Goswami 2004). By the late 1930s, there was a consensus amongst the major political and economic actors in India—with the highly significant but ultimately marginalised exception of M K Gandhi—that there needs to be a concerted and planned effort to develop the Indian economy with the active support and direction of the state (Dasgupta 2017). In the more well-known instances of state-directed economic transformation, for example, in Germany under Bismarck, or the Soviet Union under Stalin, such programmes had been undertaken under conditions of either no or highly restrictive democratic participation.

In postcolonial India, on the other hand, the aspiration was to realise it under a condition of mass democracy with universal adult suffrage. The significance of parliamentarism in the Indian constitutional design could be understood at this aspirational intersection of social transformation and democracy. As the rest of the article would argue, the question was not to somehow engineer merely a non-conflictual coexistence between mass democracy and planned development. Rather, they were viewed as mutually constitutive of each other’s viability. Each of these two novel elements in India’s political and socio-economic life introduced by the transition from colonial to postcolonial order, each marking a major break from the colonial past, required the other. Parliamentarism was a way of facilitating this constitutive process, thereby engendering a particular notion of both social transformation and democracy.

Shaping the Social Transformation Agenda

Understood from the point of view of a major and necessary agenda of socio-economic transformation, the choice of the parliament with its many parties and many voices is far from an obvious one. One could argue that the inherent institutional unity of the presidential system was far better equipped to handle the complex task of managing a planned transformation. Historically,

such state-led transformations have tended to be helmed by a powerful single leader, a plebiscitary President, or at the very least have led to the expansion of executive authority. Therefore, let us first consider what led the constitution-makers to reject the option of a presidential form of government.

For the constitution-makers, presidentialism could take one of two forms. The first was that of a unitary presidential government, unencumbered by a legislature with any meaningful powers to check it. Such a system provided the benefit of coherent centralised decision-making coupled with the necessary powers to translate those decisions into actions effectively and without institutional delays. At the same time, it resembled two recent experiences which the constitution-makers wanted to avoid: the viceregal autocracy under colonial rule and the dictatorships of the mid-20th century.

While the Indian constitution-makers' views on the subject were conditioned through their reaction to recent historical memories, recent studies have shown that there might be a more general truth to an adverse relationship between a powerful presidency and the endurance of democracy vis-à-vis parliamentarism (Przeworski et al 1996). However, it was not just an attachment to "democracy" as an abstract value that turned the constitution-makers away from systems that would engender an omnipotent leader. It was the acknowledgement that such a leader might in the end be less able to perform the task of stably helming the project of social transformation under a condition of universal franchise, a point that I will return to later in this article.

A second and more democratic version of presidentialism was identified by the Constituent Assembly as the "American system," that is, as one of the co-equal branches within a system of separation of powers. While this avoided the danger of executive autocracy, the problem with this form was precisely what the proponents of separation of powers had sought to achieve in the 18th century: slowing down the decision-making and implementation of state actions. The possibility of a divided government brought about by a stand-off between the legislature and the executive was too much of a risk under a condition where the urgency and ease of state intervention was imperative. As A K Ayyar (1948) stressed, India "cannot afford, under modern conditions, to take the risk of a perpetual cleavage, feud, or conflict or threatened conflict between the Legislature and Executive." In other words, if the first version of presidential government ran the danger of creating a leader who was too strong, the second version veered towards creating a head of government who was too constrained.

These objections seem straightforward enough in abstract terms. However, left just at an abstract level, they also seem contradictory, leading to the constitution-makers seeming confused about their preference for too strong or too constrained an executive. But, their deliberation on this topic was not framed as an abstract theoretical choice on the spectrum of weak to strong executive power, but grounded in a particular view as to how the developmental agenda could be mediated through a constitutional structure. The crucial characteristics of "effectiveness" and "constraint" that they were in search of only become comprehensible within that particular framework.

In the transitional moment of decolonisation, there was no immediate definable crisis, nor was there a plan of action to be enforced post-haste. To put it in another way, it was not a condition of emergency. Rather, the situation in India was "dynamic and fluid," to use Jawaharlal Nehru's words, with potential sources of instability which required a continual process of deliberate interventions. Such a process called for adjustments, calculations, and negotiations regularly and relatively swiftly. A parliamentary system was much better adapted to such moves. In his comparison between presidential and parliamentary systems, B R Ambedkar (1948) noted that, while presidentialism might provide more "stability," parliamentarism provides more "responsibility," the reason being that in a presidential system, "the assessment of the responsibility of the Executive is periodic. It is done by the Electorate" (Ambedkar 1948). A President for a fixed term can only be forced to make changes to their agenda through elections after a fixed period. The stability of the President—the security of the fixed term—is bought at the cost of potential rigidity, with no inherent mechanism that can force them to make adjustments to changing situations, the only constitutional recourse being periodic electoral reversals. As Juan Linz (1990) has written, "Flexibility in the face of constantly changing situations is not presidentialism's strong suit."

In contrast, Ambedkar (1948) argued, under a parliamentary system, "the assessment of responsibility of the Executive is both daily and periodic." This "daily" assessment "is done by members of Parliament, through questions, Resolutions, No-confidence motions, Adjournment motions and Debates on Addresses" (Ambedkar 1948). Parliamentary processes have inbuilt mechanisms for negotiations, bargaining, formation and shifting of coalitions, feedback, and even removal of executive functionaries. Most importantly these mechanisms are available for use almost continuously and are suitably low key, not requiring the mobilisation of nationwide elections to achieve their aims. For the task of complex management of the transformational agenda, without generating a great degree of popular political volatility and tension, such mechanisms were both more "effective" and "necessary" (Ambedkar 1948).

Beyond the flexibility for regular course correction that it offered, an executive institutionally accountable to the parliament stabilised the democratic agenda in yet another way. Each member of Parliament, in a first-past-the-post system, played a dual role as the representative of a territorially particular constituency as well as a member of the legislative body tasked with determining law and policy for the entire country. Ideally, their ties to the constituency would make them the spokesperson for various regional or group demands. The need of the executive to enjoy the continual support would force it to tailor its agenda to either satisfy the plurality of such demands or at the least ensure consent. This created an inherent mechanism for garnering a substantial level of input, accountability, and consensus regarding the transformational agenda, thereby increasing its stability and legitimacy.

Shaping Democratic Practice

If the parliamentary form was viewed as the mechanism by which the social transformational agenda could be shaped, it

was also meant to facilitate the reverse, that is, shaping the nature of the nascent mass democratic process and the way demands were articulated regarding that transformational agenda. The most common theme of concern regarding the institution of universal franchise was not that of majoritarianism or property, which one would expect from a history of Western democratisation. Rather, it was that of education (Misra 1949; Rao 1949; Rasul 1949). At an obvious level, one can view this as a reference to a population of which more than three-quarters did not know how to read and write, let alone have had a formal education.

But, it was not merely the logistical challenges of conducting elections under those conditions to which the Constituent Assembly was referring. Rather, what education meant in this context was proper training in how to be a citizen of a constitutional democracy. "We have to consider whether the sudden expansion of the franchise that will be brought about by adult franchise will be helpful to the development of democratic ideas and that sense of discrimination and restraint on which the successful exercise of democracy depends," worried the liberal H N Kunzru (1949). "This system would only succeed if effective measures are taken immediately to educate the people of India for citizenship," warned Begum Aizaz Rasul (1949). Parliamentarism, from another perspective, could be viewed as the institutional arrangement which sought to create a mechanism for such education. This point is also best illustrated in contrast with the presidential system.

Some Constituent Assembly members suggested that while the President's powers might be limited, they should still be elected by a popular vote. Nehru strongly opposed this proposal. The explicit basis of his opposition was a rather unconvincing logistical point that it would be "an extraordinary expense of time, and energy, and money" to hold yet another election simultaneously with the parliamentary elections (Nehru 1947). But, in making his case to the Constituent Assembly, he offered a glimpse of a much more important anxiety. Having a President elected by the whole population, but still denying them any "real powers" might become an "anomaly" (Nehru 1947). The worry was that a directly elected President can claim a competing source of legitimacy to the parliament, if not immediately, then in due time. Under normal circumstances, this would bring back the problem of divided governments that the Constituent Assembly sought to avoid. In extraordinary circumstances, which was not an implausible scenario given the variegated social condition undergoing a transformation (or the failure of the transformation to meet its promise), that competing claim could overwhelm the parliament's own legitimacy.

Carl Schmitt's contrast between the nature of the presidency and the parliamentary claims to legitimacy, illustrated at the eve of the crisis of the Weimar constitution, could serve as an illustration of this danger. "A presidential election" wrote Schmitt (2008), "would be more significant than any of the many elections in a democratic state." As opposed to a cabinet that holds the confidence of only a "shifting and unreliable coalition" in parliament, "the president, by contrast, has the confidence of the entire people not mediated by the parliament splintered into parties" (Schmitt 2008). In the foreseeable

situation, with popular frustration with the nature and pace of transformation, a people "impatient to govern themselves" could seek to do so through the person of a plebiscitarian President (Ambedkar 1949). The President, by virtue of being elected by the entire population, could posit themselves as the exemplary representative of the people, above and against the institutional mechanisms of the constitution. Above and against the fractious social sphere, they could claim to embody the unity of the nation in their person and their person alone.

The dangers of a plebiscitarian presidency were particularly acute in the Indian condition for two reasons: one was with the dynamics of institutional power, and the other with political theology. With regards to the former, the President would have been in control of both the administrative apparatuses of the state. These were the main protagonists of the transformational agenda. Their control of that would make them an obvious focal point of that agenda, and make the presidential election a far more meaningful one than the parliamentary one. To borrow a distinction suggested by Karl Marx in the slightly different context of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), the President would enjoy the "actual powers" of the state as opposed to the "moral power" of the parliament. With regard to the second reason, the role of the parliament was to carefully craft a unified whole out of the diversity through constitutional means and complex negotiation.

Unity as Identity

Given the obvious difficulty of that task, the President could make a much more simplified claim of unity as identity, where the unity of the nation could be embodied in their singular person. Furthermore, in the place of a managed revolution mediated by the constitution, they could claim to embody the revolution denied. With the project of managed transformation failing to keep to its original ambitious promise two decades after the making of the Constitution, Indira Gandhi would make a plebiscitary claim using elements of both these themes: promising a more efficient process of transformation while her acolytes proclaimed that "Indira is India."

These sorts of plebiscitary claims would have been directly contrary to the aspiration of development mediated by the Constitution, whereby the institutional architecture erected by the Constitution would subsume and mediate the transformational aspirations. It would tear apart the merging of transformational ambitions and constitutional structure that the Constituent Assembly was attempting to craft, giving rise to possible claims that the former could only be satisfied outside the confines of the latter. Against such a possibility, it had to be made absolutely clear, as A K Ayyar (1948) did, that "the word 'President' used in the Constitution merely stands for the fabric responsible to the Legislature." In rejecting the provision for a directly elected president and giving them any meaningful power, the constitution-makers sought to foreclose a plausible, but undesirable, path for such a claim inherent to the design of the Constitution itself.

Instead of a competing and potentially plebiscitary outlet, the constitution-makers sought to ensure that the political

energy unleashed by universal franchise and heightened by talks of social transformation would be focused exclusively on the parliament. As Nehru (1947) explained, the absence of a presidential election was “to emphasise the ministerial character of the Government that power really resided in the Ministry and in the Legislature and not in the President as such.” There should be no scope of doubt in the minds of the people that the real power for effecting the transformational agenda lies with the legislature, and the consequent battles needed to be fought on that particular terrain and on its specific terms. As those terms had an inherent space for negotiation, bargaining, and coalition formations, it meant that political contestations would be shaped accordingly, rather than through all-or-nothing extra-institutional gambits. The hope was that this would work both in terms of institutional incentives as well as a pedagogy of democratic contestation. The latter was analogous to Nehru’s hope, expressed elsewhere, that development planning would help people structure and discipline their thinking about economic transformation.

The language of development and the institutional form of parliament were the two—not perfect, but deemed the most effective—ways in which varied forms of dissensions and dissatisfactions arising out of the social sphere could be organised, and subsequently be managed, controlled, and addressed. Its value lied in its ability to avoid two different kinds of dangers: the inability of social unrest finding any path to the ears of the administrators and thereby growing into an extraconstitutional insurrection, or the claim of absolute embodiment of the whole nation by any single individual or coterie.

The Congress as a Party

Our analysis of the parliamentary nature of the constitutional structure would be incomplete without considering how the specific nature of the Congress as a political party made possible this particular institutional arrangement for social transformation under a condition of mass democracy. The Congress was not a party that was dependent on the charisma of any single individual or the allegiance of a single class. Its widespread local organisational network, tested techniques of electoral mobilisation, and its fragile, but nevertheless unparalleled, legitimacy as the party of the nationalist movement meant that it could credibly hope to build a coalition amongst different groups around the process of a deliberate social transformation. The legislature was the ideal institutional space for such coalitional ends, both in terms of managing and maintaining them, as well as providing the space for different groups to participate in them, even if contingently or partially.

In another hindsight-induced reflection, one can refer to Sudipta Kaviraj’s observation that while Indira Gandhi won elections with a larger share of the votes than Nehru, the latter was able to garner a far wider social base for his government and, hence, had a more effective capacity for manoeuvring than what the former could manage through her plebiscitarian mandates (Kaviraj 1986).

Along with the particular nature of the Congress as a party that was uniquely suitable for a parliamentary form, its confidence in garnering a certain level of popular support, at least

in the medium term, without having to worry about a serious opposition force, was also significant. At the time of independence, the most significant challenge to the Congress could come from its left, from the ideologically diverse and organisationally dispersed groups, ranging from agrarian socialists to the Communist Party of India. None of them could provide a credible challenge to the Congress’s electoral capability, and the Congress remained confident of being able to incorporate (or at least successfully negotiating with) the potential constituencies of those parties within its fold. This confidence would have been crucial to the perusal of a parliamentary form of government, which, while allowing oppositional parties a relatively easier access to state power, also opens up possibilities of co-optations. A more serious or immediate challenge to the Congress’s status as the presumptive party of governance could have made presidentialism more attractive as it offers better immediate security against the opposition’s access to power, while at the same time providing more of a reason for them to pursue an openly confrontational path and make co-optation harder.

Conclusions

This analysis of the choice of parliamentary government made by the Constituent Assembly is not meant as a broad defence of that choice in particular, or the constitutional structure itself in general. Instead, it is an invitation for an assessment of the parliamentary form of government that is grounded in the particular socio-historical constellation of the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial order. Such a historicisation allows us to evaluate competing claims of a presidential versus a parliamentary form of government in India, not through some abstract institutional cost–benefit analysis, but in the context of the developmentalist project that constituted the postcolonial regime formation. It allows us, in other words, to connect the institutional arrangements established by the Constitution with concrete sociopolitical developments.

By way of a conclusion, we can mention two such paths of analysis that such a historicisation of the parliamentary form of democracy facilitates. The first is to consider the relationship of parliamentary democracy as an important factor in explaining the trajectory of socio-economic development in postcolonial India. For example, one can critique the envisaged relation between social transformation and democracy mediated by Parliament, as outlined in this article, by showing how the project of meaningful social transformation was thwarted precisely by the ability of local elites to control the paths to electoral power. This point has been made in the works of Ronald Herring (1983) and Atul Kohli (1987), in their different ways, *vis-à-vis* land reform, arguably the most significant of all social transformative agendas in the initial decades after independence.

In a similar vein, one could analyse how the assumption that a robust democratic process that will successfully translate popular aspiration to the corridors of the state could not be achieved merely through an institutional arrangement, required an engaged political movement which the Congress had no intention of providing in the initial years, and, not unrelatedly, had no ability to lead in the more recent past. One

could also suggest that the paths of co-optation engendered by the parliamentary system compromised the ability or willingness of the left (understood broadly) to voice an organised and unified vision of an alternative social order. Each of these claims would need to go further than the role of a parliamentary form of government, since no institutional arrangement can carry that much explanatory weight. However, it illuminates the ways in which institutional choices shape and constrain the trajectory of subsequent political developments.

The second path of analysis brings us back to the ascending fortune of presidentialism—both in terms of arguments as well as actual political practice—with which this article began. The choice of parliamentarism at the moment of postcolonial transition can be comprehended as being grounded in a certain project of creating a coherent whole out of the actually existing divisions in Indian society. The Congress elite had sufficient confidence in their own legitimacy and organisational capability to facilitate flexible paths of contestation and negotiations between diverse interests through which a “developmental” project could be crafted to realise a unified postcolonial Indian polity.

The waning fortunes of the parliamentary form—not just in name but in spirit—can be linked to the exhaustion of the initial postcolonial developmentalist project. The limits of such a negotiated and coalitional developmentalist project to realise its ambitious social transformative agenda was apparent after the first two decades of independence (Kaviraj 1988). It is in view of this limit that one can understand Indira Gandhi’s challenge to the coalitional model of parliamentary government (and, for that matter, that of the Congress party organisation). Instead, she posited herself in the model of the plebiscitarian leader, seeking to represent the masses over and above the multiplicities of parliamentary representation. The voters were invited to vote for her, no matter which individual candidate appeared on the ballot. Her rhetoric was still that of developmentalism. The difference being, as opposed to the constitution-makers, she claimed that the aspirations of postcolonial development could only be addressed by a strong centralised leadership unencumbered by the fractious logic of coalitions and negotiations.

What Indira Gandhi inaugurated was a form of presidentialism by proxy. The institutional arrangements still remained

that of a parliamentary democracy, but both the political rhetoric and the operations of the government functioned on the basis of a personalised claim of unitary representation. No other political figure, since her, has been able to reproduce this at the national level. Many did so at the provincial level, especially as heads of regional parties, from Bengal, to Tamil Nadu, to Andhra Pradesh. At the national level, in the decades following Indira Gandhi, the implicit coalitional logic of parliamentary democracy was actually made explicit. Only history allows us sufficient hindsight to make an accurate judgment. But, one can argue that the current government has succeeded in reproducing presidentialism by proxy at the national level. There is a claim of Prime Minister Narendra Modi making a sort of unitary personalised claim of representation that goes above and beyond both the diverse constellation of Parliament and even his own party.

There is, however, a significant distinction between Indira Gandhi and Narendra Modi. The political ideology of the BJP—and the right-wing current in Indian politics more broadly—is more inherently sympathetic to the presidential form. As simple political mathematics would show, even at the current apex of its political fortunes, the BJP does not enjoy the kind of wide social base that the Congress did at the moment of the postcolonial transition. Neither does their language of legitimation, that of Hindu nationalist solidarity, have an inherent need for the logic of coalitions and negotiations that the language of postcolonial developmentalism adopted by the Congress did (as discussed earlier in this article).

In the context of these two distinctive features, there is more of an inherent affinity between the political vision of the BJP, and a model of representation that allows for a less differentiated unity, rather than a coalitional one. The aspiration is to transform, through the magic of representation, the extensive diversity of Indian social life into a resolute unity. The institutional form most suitable to such representational transformation is presidentialism, with the personal unity of the leader claiming to embody the unity of the nation. Hence, both the subtle shifts to a de facto presidential practice of politics, as well as claims for constitutional change to a presidential form of government at this moment should be understood as an extension of this political vision.

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