India's Liberalisation and Newspapers

Public Discourse around Reforms

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The introduction of liberal reforms has been a slow process of debate and negotiation beginning from the early 1980s. The economic benefits of liberalisation were experienced after 2003 and yet, 1991 is popularly perceived as the year of liberalisation. This article charts the changing public discourse around reforms in national English-language newspapers and argues that they played a key role in popularising liberalisation for the elites.

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Firmly embedded in the educated Indian's mind is the year of liberalisation, 1991. It was the year that India broke away from the "licence permit quota raj" (*Times of India*, 1 December 1989), "socialist ideology" (*Hindu*, 2 April 1985), "corruption and inefficiency" (*Hindu*, 17 July 1991) and brought in "revolutionary changes to free the economy and make it outwards looking" (*Times of India*, 24 March 1985), and "increased the efficiency and international competitiveness of industrial production" (*Hindu*, 22 July 1991) and "imparted a new element of dynamism to growth processes in our economy" (*Times of India*, 24 July 1991). This narrative of transition and change is sharply dissonant with the process of liberalisation undergone by the Indian economy.

There were no references in English-language national newspapers in 1991 about the green revolution package being one of the first large-scale liberal reforms introduced in the economy in 1965–66; or that partial liberalisation measures had been introduced in the 1980s itself; or that the pace of liberalisation has been so slow and strongly debated, that even 25 years after liberalisation we continue to be one of the most insular high-growth countries. Moreover, the economy did not grow spectacularly in the 1990s as had been proclaimed. In fact, the 1980s was one of the highest economic growth periods experienced by the economy. The real take-off in growth, private investments, and exports happened after 2003, more than a decade after liberalisation. And yet the public imagination perceives 1991 as the turning point, dividing the old Indian economy from the new one.

This article traces some of the changing rhetoric and frames around which liberalisation is discussed in English-language newspapers in India and argues that this change set the terms of debate and critiques of liberal reforms. This is an important question as it has been well established (Vakulabharanam 2005; Motiram and Vakulabharanam 2012) that liberal reforms contributed to increasing inequality, neglect of the agricultural sector and immiserisation of landless peasants. However, the redistributive consequences of liberal reforms were not discussed in newspaper reportage on liberal reforms. Moreover, contemporary public discourse has tended to explain the high growth achieved by the economy after 2003 as a consequence of liberal reforms but has blamed increasing inequality as a shortcoming of government social policy. This tendency to judge reforms on growth and investment criteria and not conflate it with any redistributive consequences is a consequence of how reforms were framed by influential English-language newspapers in 1991.

This article will be structured in the following way. First, it will be argued that the importance of the private media grew over the 1980s, creating the political economy conditions for newspapers to influence public discourse on liberal reforms. Second, it will theorise how changing frames of public discourse can change the understanding of a policy for its reader. Third, it will chart the changing rhetoric around liberal reforms from 1985 to 1991 and establish that the rhetoric had changed quite substantially. It will then conclude that this changing rhetoric was beneficial to large businesses and media houses which gained immensely from liberal reforms. Given the size and scope of this article, it is not possible to establish evidence from all sections of the media. However, the author hopes that within the limits of this article, the reader will gain a novel theoretical perspective about the structural and political factors that shaped the introduction of liberal reforms in India at a time when there was sufficient political resistance against it.

Upon independence, it was decided that the media in India should be informational and educational. This was influenced by Gandhian ideals of frugality in consumption, and newspapers (except a few large English-language dailies) did not accept advertisements (Rajagopal 2009: 10). News was not treated as a commodity to be marketed and sold. The "Indian nationalist saw the establishment and enhancement of the Indian nation as the aim of the media and the principal criterion for assessing it" (Rajagopal 2009: 11). The mass media was largely controlled directly by the state. The government was the only broadcaster in radio and television, since its introduction in the 1970s. Many private newspapers existed, but the government rationed newsprint, which affected the pricing of newspapers.

Changing Mass Media

Robin Jeffrey (2010: 169) has written at length about the changing impact of mass media in Indian political economy with the commercialisation of the mass media. He has argued that most of the media was not commercialised till the 1980s, and except for some national English-language newspapers, advertisers were hesitant to advertise in papers. Further, he argues that the Indian government was the largest advertiser, and newspapers adhered to government regulation of content to gain advertising revenue. Private newspapers had the freedom to determine content. However, they were dependent on the state for newsprint and advertisements. This functioned as a mode of increased control on newspaper content after independence, culminating in its complete control during the Emergency. The end of the Emergency in 1977 coincides with the growing importance of the private media. Multiple factors contributed to the growth of the private media, which would over-take the size and importance of the public media by the 1990s.

Middle-class consciousness: The excesses of the Emergency imposed in 1977 led to the creation of a national middle-class consciousness. This was especially true for an expanding group of educated youth who were born after independence, and had actively participated in the movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan. They felt a growing alienation towards large-scale state-controlled development programmes and the public discourse around sacrifices and socialism. Moreover, there was a growing distrust of information provided by the public media. This class had a keen desire for gadgets and conveniences, a strong aspiration to work abroad and felt increasing frustration with socialist ideals (Thomas 2010: 178). This growing educated group would be an important audience for the private media in the 1980s.

Expanding vernacular media: Except for a few large English-language dailies, advertisers had stayed away from newspapers because of the perceived low rate of readership in India. The Emergency brought an increased public demand for private newspapers, as well as an increased consciousness amongst advertisers about the reach of newspapers, especially the vernacular ones.

> A key element in fostering this awareness was the National Readership Survey II (NRS–II) in 1978, the year after the 'Emergency' ended. Sponsored by advertisers and advertising agencies. ... NRS II estimated a two-third increase in urban readers since 1970 and hinted strongly at a great untapped pool of readers—and potential consumers. (Thomas 2010: 179)

Most unexpectedly, it showed that the largest growth in readership had been in class III towns.

Improvement in printing technology: With the discovery of large markets in towns and semi-urban areas, newspapers started investing in revolutionising technology. Once, one newspaper in a region showed that it could win substantial revenues in a region, other newspapers had to compete or risk failure. The media sector was one of the first sectors where competition and a high rate of return gave incentives for firms to innovate. This would typify the media industry after liberalisation as companies would try to capture markets from each other through advertising and innovation.

Media–business–politics nexus: Vernacular newspapers provided a forum to create a regional identity. Some notable examples of the growing political influence and commercial viability of vernacular newspapers are *Eenadu* and Sun TV. *Eenadu*, a Telugu-language daily, and its proprietor Ramoji Rao not only financially supported the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), but were also involved in creating an environment conducive for TDP to sweep power from the Congress. Moreover, the office spaces, printers and personnel of *Eenadu* often provided the basic infrastructure for the TDP in its embryonic stages (Thomas 2010: 76). More recently, the owners of Sun TV, the Marans, have played a similar role for Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's (DMK) rise to power in Tamil Nadu. Sometimes, the sheer reach and strength of a newspaper in the public imagination could affect the political situation of the state. The *Punjab Kesari* became the highest circulating Hindi-language newspaper in 1986 on the strength of its anti-Khalistan discourse. The power of vernacular newspapers to earn revenue, influence political discourse, and create regional identities led to many influential business persons and politicians entering the private media after liberalisation.

These factors played a crucial role in creating the conditions of existence for the private media. This is an important argument, as private English-language newspapers would not have changed public discourse around reforms if they would were not positioned to benefit from reforms. Kohli-Khandekar (2010) has charted the explosive growth in size and revenues of the private media after liberalisation.

Rhetoric and Economic Policies

Economic policies are debated, negotiated and implemented based on economic and political factors. Members of Parliament and bureaucrats tend to explain/justify policies using rhetoric which is accessible to the public. There is a tendency to use terms/words which evoke a certain meaning in the public imagination. In this sense, the Nehruvian state, social justice or Gandhian morals have a strong resonance with the public. A popular narrative of policies is required by political ideologues to gain democratic support from the masses. Moreover, the government has to justify its policies to the masses and requires a grammar to do so. Economic independence and sacrifice for the betterment of the nation were popular rhetorical tropes to justify economic policies which did not benefit the masses. Critiques of government policies have to engage with the tropes and arguments embedded in the public imagination.

Popular explanations of Indian economic policies after independence were articulated by M K Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi. Each added different elements to what is now popularly referred as "licence permit quota raj" (*Times of India*, 1 December 1989), "Nehruvian management of the Indian economy" (*Hindu*, 17 July 1991) or "socialist" (*Hindu*, 2 April 1985) economic policies. Nehru had the broadest vision of the three. He envisaged setting up a developmental state, which would actively plan and work with the private sector to industrialise the country.

There were two key elements in his plan: the control of resources by the state, to be channelled towards industrial investment with a long gestation period and to immunise the economy from foreign competition and fluctuations in the global market. Gandhi was staunchly against a centralised state-led industrialisation model. However, some of his thinking was appropriated in a diluted form by the Nehruvian state discourse. These included ideas about the importance of Indian cottage industry, of small-scale manufacture and having a moral purpose behind economic actions. Indira Gandhi brought her own twist to the narrative of the Nehruvian state when she came to power with Congress(I) in the 1970s. Most importantly, she highlighted the plight of the poor, introduced redistributive economic policies and curbed powers of vested interest groups. Overall, these set of policies comprised the popular understanding of Indian economic policies before liberalisation. These policies were justified on the grounds that the two main economic roles of the state were to develop the economy and maintain political and economic freedom.

However, the mass media plays an important role in interpreting and explaining economic policies to their audience, in this case, the English-speaking citizenry of India. The media interprets policies by framing them within certain terms of debate. The frame provides the categories within which we understand an issue, it establishes the limits of the discussion and defines the range of problems that it can refer to. Tone, headline, quotations and placement of article within a paper have an important role in determining the framing of an article.

The Approach

The media, which was mainly newspapers in the 1980s, played an important role in setting the terms of debate for liberalisation policies. I focus on English-language national dailies, mainly *Hindu* and *Times of India*, as these were the highest circulated English-language newspapers. English-language newspapers are read by a small section of English-literate Indians, and newspaper articles cannot be considered representative of the people of India. However, these papers are hugely influential as they are read by a policy-influencing elite which include bureaucrats, professional classes, urban formal sector workers, and businesspersons. I have not surveyed business newspapers and magazines even though they are an important part of the newspaper landscape, as their readership is much lower than these two English dailies and the arguments about rhetoric in these newspapers are similar for other elite English-language publications.

One shortcoming of this article is that it has not surveyed vernacular newspapers, which will have very different politics of rhetoric and framing of liberal reforms. Readers can refer to Rajagopal's (2001) seminal work on understanding public discourse in the late 1980s and 1990s in Hindi television shows to gain deeper insights into the political economy of the vernacular media in India in 1991. I survey newspapers in years where new governments were elected and on days when budgets or economic surveys were presented. This includes 1985, 1989, 1990 and 1991. I study articles about economic policy to extract the different kinds of arguments made about liberalisation and analyse how newspapers frame these arguments. I have not studied editorials and op-ed pieces as they reflect the opinions of specific individuals or editors. Newspaper reports are typically framed as objective pieces of information.

This article studies newspaper reports to show that objective news pieces are framed to influence the reader. It argues that the framing and rhetoric of newspaper articles has consequences for the reader's understanding of liberal reforms. The larger purpose will be to ascertain whether there were any specific framing and rhetorical strategies utilised by newspapers regarding liberalisation. The following sections will provide a chronological history of the changing public discourse around reforms. This section has been presented in a chronological series to demonstrate that reforms did not have popular support amongst politicians and policymakers. Moreover, the introduction of reforms in 1991 was unexpected for the larger masses and contingent on certain circumstances.

The Context

After coming back to power in 1980, Indira Gandhi had slowly been changing her rhetoric around economic policies. While, over the 1970s she targeted vested interest groups from the Nehruvian era which included: large corporations both Indian and foreign, former princes, professional classes and formal sector employees, and pitched her policies as pro-poor and socialist (interpreted as state control of banks and heavy industries). Upon returning to power in 1980, she shed her earlier rhetoric and started articulating the need for deregulation and partial reforms. Moreover, she started speaking about growth as an end in itself, which was starkly different from the Nehruvian ideal that growth should translate into industrial development and redistribution. At that time, this felt like lip service, but on hindsight, it would seem that Indira Gandhi was wary of Congress supporters who still held on strongly to the Nehruvian and Gandhian ideals. It was easier for Rajiv Gandhi to speak the language of liberalisation as he was a young, foreign educated, working professional, and could be perceived as being a dynamic growth-oriented Prime Minister.

Rajiv Gandhi-led Government

When Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister in 1985, there was a growing expectancy that he would be able to make bold changes that previous Congress governments had failed to do. Vishwanath Pratap (VP) Singh, who was Rajiv Gandhi's finance minister at that time, presented his 1985 budget with high hopes amongst parts of the economic elite expecting liberal reforms. However, V P Singh's budget speech hardly made any reference to liberalisation and the overall focus was on the "Need for structural changes to tackle the growing fiscal debt" (*Hindu,* 16 March 1985). Irrespective of intention, the V P Singh-led finance ministry steered clear of talk about liberal reforms. However, on the same day, another article claimed that this budget "would take the country to the 21st century" (*Times of India*, 21 March 1985) and that "[T]he budget is an indication of the new government's endeavour towards this direction [with reference to liberal economic policies]" (insertion mine). V P Singh himself had given no indication publicly that structural changes would translate into liberal policies. The media, however, interpreted the first budget of the Rajiv Gandhi-led government as pro-liberalisation. This interpretation, was not made in a vacuum, and there was quite a strong contestation of liberalisation in public discourse. A few days after the budget, *Hindu* quoted a representative of the Congress (Socialist) criticising the budget for having "given the go by to the objective of socialism, and would lead to privatisation of the economy at the expense of the poor" (*Hindu*, 26 March 1985). This quote frames the terms of debate around liberalisation and privatisation as contradicting the objectives of socialism and leading to greater inequality. While the government itself did not directly talk about liberalisation in the budget, it did respond to some of the criticisms levelled against it.

V P Singh responded to this criticism in the Rajya Sabha a couple of days later, claiming that the "government was not deviating from the path of socialism followed by the Congress government in the past." He assuaged doubters saying that, "the budget sought to make basic structural reforms without deviating from the economic philosophy pursued so far." He further "quoted from the speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru to show that his budget represented no departure from the concept of socialism" (*Hindu*, 28 March 1985). These quotes are highlighted to indicate that liberalisation was not consensually agreed upon in the 1980s. In fact, there were fears of not getting legislative support for these policies even within the Congress. Singh was careful to label new policies as structural changes and was quick to clarify that these were not deviating from Nehruvian policies or socialism.

V P Singh-led Coalition

In December 1989, the Congress government was dissolved. A new coalition government headed by Singh came to power. With Singh as Prime Minister, there were expectations of the government continuing with the liberalisation process. However, Singh took an unexpected course and started disengaging himself from liberal reforms. Within a week of becoming Prime Minister, Singh congratulated the liberalisation measures taken by the previous government,

> he hailed the steps taken by outgoing government (sic) to reduce controls, lift import restrictions and start dismantling the license permit quota raj ... but he is quite clear that one cannot afford laissez faire. (*Times of India*, 1 December 1989)

He distanced himself from expectations that his government will be introducing other liberal reforms.

The Prime Minister's comments are framed in the same paper along with another article titled "Reverberations in global market after elections," which questions the failure to introduce liberal policies. It states, "The questions generally have been whether political (sic) ambiance in India would affect the policy of liberalisation and freedom in the economy" (*Times of India*, 1 December 1989). The article further qualifies why the global market is concerned. It argues that "Several foreign investors from diverse sectors of industry had been attracted to India for the last decade or so, as a sequel to the liberation of the economy," however, there is much more scepticism now that political uncertainty has slowed down the reform process. This article argues for liberalisation policies as they will bring in foreign investors, however, neither does it explain why foreign investment is good, nor does it evaluate the impact of liberal reforms on the economy. From the late 1980s onwards, the media would frame the government's failure to introduce liberal policies as political factors overriding economic factors. The media reports argue that liberalisation makes sense in economic terms, while they remained completely silent about which classes would benefit from liberalisation and what would be its macroeconomic and redistributive consequences.

The then Finance Minister Madhu Dandavate refrained from referring to liberalisation in his budget speech. He acknowledged the need for structural changes to negotiate the high fiscal deficit and low foreign reserves in the economy. He, however, refused to conflate structural changes with liberalisation. He said, "I am convinced that our people will make any sacrifice and meet any challenge in order to preserve economic independence and spirit of self reliance" (*Hindu*, 21 March 1990). Moreover, he justified his budget saying that "his budget very much reflected the socialist view point in that it tried to divert the money to poorer sections of society by taming the rich" (*Times of India*, 2 April 1990). Dandavate rhetorically refers back to Nehruvian arguments of the importance of self-reliance, economic independence and socialism. He was acutely aware of the necessity of structural changes to stem the increasing fiscal and current account deficit. However, he did not conflate structural changes with liberalisation, although there was a clear demand for it from certain classes. It is hard to interpret whether Dandavate was actually against liberalisation or feared that his government would not get political support for it. But he stuck to framing changes within the Nehruvian discourse on economic policy.

Chandrashekhar-led Coalition

The V P Singh government stayed in office for a year after losing majority support in the legislature. It was followed by a Chandrashekhar-led minority government. This was a time of immense turmoil in the world economy with the Gulf Crisis, the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the fall of the Berlin Wall, and religious turmoil in the country. This had been noted in the *Economic Survey* which reports "that this (referring to the crisis in the global economy) should warn us against being complacent with the likely 5% growth" (*Times of India*, 5 January 1991).

However, the Chandrashekhar government, not wanting to give up on its tenuous hold on the legislature, did not discuss structural changes of any kind, and went so far as to actively start taking an anti-liberalisation stance. Some of his noteworthy quotes in the newspaper were: "Chandrashekhar said planning has become more necessary to make optimal use of limited resources" (*Times of India*, 12 January 1991). And one titled "Liberalisation Catering to Small Section of Society" states that "the PM warns the country's future will be mortgaged if liberalisation is allowed in fields where resource is low" and reinstates the importance of providing "autonomy to the public sector" (*Times of India,* 11 January 1991).

In response to such statements, the media published articles titled "India Is a Tiger Caged by Its Ideology" (*Times of India*, 9 January 1991), which quotes an international management professor from Kellogg Graduate School of Management, who questions whether India's closed economy after 40 years has led to any significant improvement in gross domestic product. On the same day, in an article titled "Decentralise Industries, Says SEBI," the Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India G V Ramkrishna asserts that "the bottom line of all business enterprises should be profit" (*Times of India,* 19 January 1991). And that "businesses should not survive merely on patriotism." The media had started actively framing Chandrashekhar's critique of the unequalising effects of liberalisation, as the government's attempt to shackle the economy's potential. There is no mention in newspapers about how there are clear gainers and losers from liberal policies, and how in the short run it will benefit larger companies, industries and professional classes.

Narasimha Rao-led Government

The Chandrashekhar government dissolved in March 1991 without giving the slightest indication that liberal reforms could be introduced. A new coalition Congress government came to power headed by P V Narasimha Rao, and Manmohan Singh as finance minister. The new Congress government introduced liberal reforms. While the pace of introduction was slow, their public discourse on economic policies changed. This changed discourse made the public aware of liberal reforms and connected 1991 to liberalisation.

Within days of the new Congress government being formed, the media was flush with a "call to open up the economy on all fronts" (*Times of India*, 4 July 1991a), "to evolve a 'minimum' program acceptable to all to rejuvenate the economy of India" (*Times of India*, 4 July 1991b), and to "adhere faithfully to a sound macro-economic discipline and implement fundamental structural reforms to strengthen their economic base" (*Times of India*, 16 July 1991). An increasing amount of space was given to speakers from institutions which were lobbying for liberal reforms, which included the International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief Micheal Landessen (*Times of India*, 16 July 1991), chairman of Tata Steel Russi Mody (*Times of India*, 23 July 1991), president of the Bombay Stock Exchange H M Kothari (*Times of India*, 2 July 1991) and president of the Confederation of Indian Industry Dhruv Sawhney (*Times of India*, 4 July 1991a). Moreover, most articles considered structural change as apparent and framed the lack of liberalisation as political interest overriding economic acumen. The narrative around the lack of liberalisation was one in which vested interest groups, who had been profiting from the licence raj, were resisting changes. The following is one amongst many articles which argues that the opposition towards reforms is largely because

> the political class, by and large, which is dominated by the Congress party would (sic) want to continue to have a say in an economy as well as to retain its capacity to favour one industrial house over another. (*Hindu,* 17 July 1991)

There were also intense discussions about the "loss of economic sovereignty" (*Hindu*, 24 July 1991), however this was recast as a debate based on economic merit not loss of economic autarky. The above article argues that "The resistance is understandable only when we view it from the perspective of political science. What the opponents of the (IMF) loan resist is the loss of economic sovereignty that taking the IMF loans imply." Such articles argued that economic sovereignty is a noble aim foisted by our colonial past. The truth of the matter is that we live in a world where all economies are dependent on each other and we cannot ignore the benefits of this. Once again, liberalisation was treated as an objective solution to problems brought about by an increasingly interlinked global economy. Interestingly, there was a serious dearth of articles talking about the possible harmful repercussions of loans. The only critical article that I came across was nestled in the middle pages of the *Hindu*, following the day after the budget titled "Warning Note on the IMF Remedy" (*Hindu*, 20 July 1991). The article is fairly abstract and ends with a counterfactual question "Even without such changes (reference to reforms) it may be difficult to say how the economy would have performed if the programme had not been implemented" (insertion mine).

Manmohan Singh took a different rhetorical approach from the finance ministers in previous years. Upon being selected as finance minister, he was quoted as saying that "India ready for big changes" and that "India has begun a fundamental shift in priorities that look (sic) for the first time to South Korea and prosperous South Eastern nations as guiding economic symbols." He further emphasised "essentially that the nation's elite must forgo their 'ideological hangover' because India has no viable option except to open its door to the West as well as Asia" (*Times of India*, 10 July 1991).

These were arguments to break the consensus around the Nehruvian ideals and justify reforms. It was pitched that this change is based on objective economic judgment and the tendency to hold on to Nehruvian ideals of socialism and autarky is regressive, as it benefits a small political class which feeds off it. Liberalisation was pitched as freedom from government intervention and freedom to connect with the rest of the economic world. Unlike previous finance ministers who always qualified structural changes as being founded on Nehruvian ideals, Manmohan Singh went in a completely different direction by continuously repeating the need for structural change. Moreover, he highlighted that "the thrust of the reform process should be to increase efficiency and international competitiveness of industrial production" (*Hindu*, 22 July 1991).

In his budget speech, Singh state that "Macroeconomic stabilisation and fiscal adjustment alone cannot suffice. They must be supported by essential reforms in economic policy and economic management as an integral part of the adjustment process" (*Times of India*, 24 July 1991). He also continuously critiqued failures of the Nehruvian state, distancing himself from these ideals. He said about reforms that they "would help to eliminate waste and inefficiency and impart a new element of dynamism to growth processes in our economy." The new buzz words introduced were growth, dynamism, competitiveness and stability which overthrew the older rhetoric of economic independence, socialism, equity and justice. This change in public discourse is highlighted by an article which came out in the *Hindu* on the same day as the second budget proposed by Singh. The article refers to the breaking away from the Nehruvian discourse and commends the finance minister for "taking the economy out of the woods and the entrepreneur out of the bureaucracy of the 'License Raj' which replaced the British Raj." Moreover, the writer suggests that this budget will be appreciated by entrepreneurs as "this particular budget will be remembered because it is the first change-oriented, strategic, more economic and less political budget." He further referred to the death of Nehruvian rhetoric and pointed out that, "terms with political undertones such as 'the socialist, etc,' have almost disappeared out of the budget document" (*Hindu*, 31 March 1992).

Another interesting thing to note is that, while there were articles critiquing reforms, they were all rhetorical not analytical in nature. For example, one critical article from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) chief alleviated concerns by saying that "there will be no trail of human suffering as a result of the impending sweeping structural changes in the Indian economy" (*Times of India*, 6 July 1991) and another titled "Bitter Pill as Soporific" conflated market-biased orientation as "not equitable and leading to increasing inequality, as there are no anti-monopoly and anti-trust laws" (*Times of India*, 29 July 1991). Another article accused the "government of giving the go-by to the policies of Nehru" (*Hindu*, 31 July 1991) and said that this "would lead to anarchy in the economic system. It will help multinationals but hurt the common man." There were no articulate critiques of liberal reforms, no mention of the deleterious effects it had on South American economies, no mention of how the Asian tigers all grew without introducing structural reforms, very little reference to how structural reforms tends to increase inequality and hurt the agricultural economy. The newspapers did not frame a critique of reforms, instead dissidents spoke about a break away from Nehruvian ideals. This played into the hands of Singh and other proponents of liberalisation who argued for a need to change because of the different stage of development that India has reached and because the global context had changed.

Conclusions

The arguments around liberal reforms changed from 1985 to 1991. Liberalisation was perceived as a dilution of Nehruvian socialist policies and India's economic independence in 1985. However, the growing fiscal and balance of payment crisis made the IMF loans and structural changes unavoidable. In budget speeches in 1985, 1989 and 1990 the finance ministers were careful not to conflate structural changes with liberalisation, as they expected a popular backlash against liberalisation, which were perceived as a break from Nehruvian statist policies.

As the size and influence of the private media increased over the 1980s, English-language newspapers started arguing and giving print coverage to arguments justifying liberalisation. English-language newspapers, through their articles, argued that economic policies should be based on economic analysis not political considerations, alluding to the fact that under the Nehruvian planning model, state intervention determined economic outcome. They also argued that liberalisation would attract foreign capital and investors who would contribute towards the growth of the economy. These arguments undermined the importance of economic independence and self-reliance as a justification for the Nehruvian state. The Congress government in 1991 introduced liberal reforms, and Singh distinctly changed the rhetoric around reforms. He justified structural change and reforms as a necessity in an increasingly interlinked world. He also distanced himself from the ideals of the Nehruvian state. English-language dailies in 1991 published articles celebrating liberal reforms introduced by Singh, and did not provide any articulate critiques of reforms. This played an important role in gaining consent for liberalisation amongst the English-speaking elite.

The history of changing public discourse around reforms has been presented in a chronological order to demonstrate that reforms were not introduced based on rational policy analysis or popular support. Rather, it was introduced as a consequence of changing circumstances in the global economy and within the Indian polity. Moreover, the decision to implement reforms was not a continuous process of discussion and negotiation, but one mired in contingency and uncertainty. The introduction of reforms in 1991 was not advertised to the larger voting masses, instead it was marketed to a small elite economic class which would benefit from it. Newspapers played an important role in convincing influential economic elite classes of the benefits of liberalisation, while also framing reforms in such a way that its harmful effects were silenced.

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