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**IDEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS IN POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN
KARNATAKA: JANATA DAL IN THE LATE 1990S.**

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The political party which used to be known as Janata Dal has been notorious for splitting and fragmenting in a political landscape in which the splitting and fragmentation of political parties occurs relatively often. In this paper I focus on instability in the party leadership in the state of Karnataka in the late 1990s¹. I argue that there were ideological elements which helped to shape political rivalries and provide rationalizations for political action.

A comprehensive analysis of the Janata Dal, a party which saw itself as bearing a socialist legacy and as a third front in Indian politics, would have to take in several variables which I do not investigate here. The party nationally had a structure which was especially vulnerable and ill-equipped to deal with tensions among party leaders in the states. In the period under examination the Janata Dal was a conglomeration of state-based political organizations. It was a party made up of regional movements and its ruling structure could not exert authority sufficient for the management of disputes among party leaders in the states.² The Janata Dal as a national party is not a focus for discussion here.

A comprehensive study of the break-up of the Janata Dal in Karnataka in the late 1990s would also take into consideration economic conditions and trends and as well as changes in social bases among political parties. Discussions of the latter are to be found in articles which analyse Assembly and General Elections in the late 1990s.³ These articles outline shifting social bases and attempts to mold castes and religious groups into conglomerations of support for different parties. Harold Gould argues persuasively in his analysis of the Assembly and General Elections of 1999 that the compulsions of balancing the contradictory demands of rivalrous caste clusters and regions created complex and difficult tensions; the management of relations among social groups which were in intense competition in itself made for instability in state politics (Gould 2003). A politician in Karnataka, as elsewhere in India, usually

¹ The gracious assistance of Neelambar Hatti, James Manor, V.K. Natraj and Sandeep Shastri made possible much of the research upon which this study is based. In Hubli-Dharwad Ms Kamalaxi G. Tadasad kindly served as a translator when necessary and accompanied me to meet informants. Thanks to the Department of History at the University of Oslo for funding this research. I assume responsibility for this work.

² Prem Shanker Jha, "Need for Consensus in Janata Dal", *The Hindu*, 8 August 1991.

³ See, for example, Shastri 1999, Gould 1999, Gould 2003, Assadi 1998.

builds his⁴ early career as a spokesman and fixer for the community he comes from, at the same time as he also tries to make alliances with other caste, language, and religious communities. A complicating factor in Karnataka is that the two dominating, rival caste groups (Vokkaligas and Lingayats) are associated with regions in intense competition for state resources. Vokkaligas tend to come from the wetter, richer southern part of the state while Lingayats dominate the dryer, poorer northern part. No politician in Karnataka can escape complications which arise from these compounded rivalries.

Relations among Karnataka politicians are affected by issues of one's own caste or religious identity and the demands of relating to the identities of a large number of competing other groups. The argument of this paper is that relations among politicians are also complicated by notions of personal status and prestige which are connected to caste, but which at the same time transcend caste. There are in elite politics in Karnataka concepts of status and authority which are associated with political transactions in rural society.⁵ That some politicians and observers recognize this is suggested by references in newspaper reports and political discussions to "panchayet level politics" or "palegar politics" when criticising political behavior. "Panchayat" refers of course to village government and "palegars" were belligerent chiefs who ruled the Karnataka country-side in the 18th and early 19th century. The complex of values and concepts which are my focus below revolve around notions of status that are best translated by the English words honor and respect and speak to personal or group achievement, authority and/or domination. Concepts of moral integrity are also included in the complex.

There are many words and values attached to concepts of status, honor, respect and self-respect in Karnataka. Notions of honor which are associated with achievement, authority and/or dominance, include *sanmana* (high honor which is displayed through giving in public) and *stannamana* (the honor which

⁴ Research is needed to establish the extent to which women's strategies for a political career are similar to men's strategies.

comes from holding a position). There is also a concept, *mana*, which is a more private quality relating to one's inner character.⁶ Both rural and urban non-politicians I met doubted that politicians in general had good character. A Backward Caste farmer in Uttar Kannada gave a common opinion when he said, "You enter politics only when you have no *mana*, when you have no face (*moka*). Politicians may think they have *mana*. They have no sense of these things".⁷

There has been some focus on ideologies of honor in south India. Suzanne Hanchett, M.N. Srinivas, Bruce Tapper and I have written on honor and respect in village contexts (Hanchett 1975, Srinivas 1996, Tapper 1987, Price Under review), while Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge broke new ground with their studies of the distribution of honors in temple ritual (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976, Appadurai 1981). Nicholas Dirks and I have written on honor in royal domains in precolonial and colonial Tamil Nadu (Dirks 1987, Price 1996B), while I have pursued the topic in post-colonial politics (Price 1996A, Price 1999, Price Forthcoming). The aim of this study is to explain how political transactions at the state level in Karnataka can be related to notions of personal status, honor and self-respect.

It is common to associate honor in politics with warrior societies and their focus on heroism. The politics of honor in warrior society in pre-colonial south India included conventional patterns of action and reaction (Price 1996A: 9-38). Here one finds rivalry for authority and domination in which the status of rivals can be threatened by humiliating defeats and shows of disrespect.. Revenge was a predictable response. For reasons which cannot be investigated in this piece, one finds in the politics of honor in Karnataka some of the same themes of humiliation and revenge.

Academic writers rarely analyse "personality clashes" or the "clash of egos" among politicians. Such conditions are, however, the object of comment in

⁵ For Karnataka, see Price Forthcoming . I have found this to be the case as well in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. See Price 1996A, Price 1996B and Price Under review.

⁶ The meaning of these words and others associated with honor and respect alter according to context.

English-language newspapers.⁸ To phrase comments about failures of cooperation in those terms can give the impression that emotions can override reason in political transactions. While it appears that emotions can take control of events, some part of the rhetoric of splitting and fragmentation is contrived. Politicians on occasion appear to be phrasing their actions in a language which will make them explicable to their constituents and potential new supporters.⁹ This is the language of honor, respect and humiliation. References to honor and respect are found throughout political discourse in India, from Dalit parties and groups to speeches in the Lok Sabha.¹⁰ The vocabulary associated with relations of honor is particularly brought into play when politicians explain to journalists or say in a statement why they are leaving one political coalition, party or faction for another. They often give as a reason that they have suffered humiliation in the former context.¹¹ While this characteristic is found frequently in Karnataka (as elsewhere in India), the late 1990s illustrates the point well. We find this usage with reference to the Rashtriya Navanirman Vardika, a non-party organization which former Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde formed after he was expelled from the Janata Dal in 1996 and started his own party, the Lok Shakti, in 1997.

The political language of honor represents more than opportunistic contrivance. While the contradictory claims of many social segments fuel political instability, relations among politicians can also be fraught and vulnerable because of strong emotions attached to perceptions of challenge to one's personal status and authority. The language of honor used in political rhetoric reflects preoccupations with status which are not universal

⁷ Interview, 26 December 1997, near Sirsi. Neelambar Hatti assisted with interpretation in this meeting.

⁸ See, for example, the article by J.D. Seth, "The Crises of the Janata Dal", *Indian Express*, 31 August 1991. In *The Hindu*, 12 January 1998, P. Ramiah quoted Chief Minister J.H. Patel as attributing "most of the 'hiccups' of his party to personal prejudices and personality clashes", in "BJP's Stable-Govt Plea Won't Help: CM".

⁹ I elaborate on this point in the forthcoming article, "Ideological Integration".

¹⁰ Recently, for example, *The Hindu*, 19 March 2005, reported that there would be a meeting in Bangalore organized by an outfit calling itself the Rashtriya Swabiman [self-respect] Morch to protest the "undemocratic practices" of the central government and quoted Subramanian Swamy as saying that the denial of a visa by the US government to the Chief Minister of Gujarat was "unacceptable for Indian honour and self-respect".

¹¹ When the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Chandra Babu Naidu, shifted his support from the Congress-led United Front to adopt a neutral stance toward the new BJP government at the center, he wrote to former Prime Minister Deve Gowda that "I consider this [action of Congress] an act of insult and humiliation to my State, my party and me. In such [a] painful situation I have no choice but to disassociate myself from the United Front" (*The Hindu*, 24 March 1998).

among politicians in Karnataka, but which are common enough to affect the nature of many political competitions and the outcome of political transactions. Because of preoccupation with personal honor and shows of respect, competition often turns into powerful *personal* rivalry. A strong element in this rivalry is suspicion that one's rival seeks to humiliate one. Narendar Pani of *The Economic Times*, said, when I asked him about political honor in Karnataka politics, "Self-respect is important for all Karnataka politicians. A politician in Karnataka cannot suffer having his self-respect challenged in public. His self-respect cannot be politically challenged".¹²

Revenge can be a response to public humiliation. In some political cosmologies in rural and urban Karnataka, rivalry and revenge are accepted as "natural" forms of political engagement. While rivalry among heads of factions in village politics in India has been an object of scholarly attention, less is known about how rivalry and revenge operate in state and national level politics. In political competitions where participants are preoccupied with personal honor and status, revenge for public humiliation is a common principle for political action. From the point of view of the history of political culture, the form and content of conflicts are commonly shaped by what participants feel to be appropriate responses to the actions of others. Revenge can be appropriate, even when it has long-term destructive consequences.

Preoccupation with personal status is expressed in the behavior which observers describe as "personality clashes". Such preoccupation contributes to the vulnerability which some politicians feel and to the instability of political parties. Former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao refers to this vulnerability in his autobiographical novel, *The Insider* (Narasimha Rao 1998). The novel provides illustrations of the role of notions of honor and fear of public humiliation in the framing of relations among politicians.¹³ Below I will

¹² Interview, 8 May 1998, Bangalore. I conducted interviews in English when possible. I did not use a tape-recorder for any of the interviews in this study, but was allowed to take notes.

¹³ I discuss the novel in "Ideological Integration".

discuss the well-known rivalry between former Prime Minister Deve Gowda and Ramakrishna Hegde in these terms.

The language of honor is not only culturally appropriate usage in competition and conflict. The cultural dynamics of conflict in Karnataka party politics encompasses notions of one's worth in the eyes of others, as well as one's sense of self-worth. Focus on honor and shows of respect contribute to the fluidity of political relations in a context of weak organizational structures in political parties. My argumentation begins with characterizations of Karnataka party politics which I collected during an eight month stay in the state in 1997-98.¹⁴

A BRIEF CHARACTERIZATION OF RELATIONSHIPS IN INTRA-PARTY POLITICS

The general aspect of party politics which is most relevant to the discussion presented here is the phenomenon of deinstitutionalization, made well-known by Atul Kohli in the study he published in 1990 (Kohli 1990). This process refers to the disintegration of party structures, in the sense of a relative lack of elected or appointed posts with defined responsibilities and powers. Deinstitutionalization refers, also, to increased focus on personal loyalty to powerful personalities as a major criterion for career advancement. Similarly, the roles which personalities, as opposed to policies, acquire as a focus for some political parties has been another aspect of deinstitutionalization. The process has occurred unevenly in India, with the BJP and CPI(M), for example, experiencing some success with cadre organization. Recognition of the pitfalls of weak party organization has led to efforts of improvement, in, for example, the Janata Dal before its split in 1999 and in the Congress (I) under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi.

In the Janata Dal in Karnataka in the late 1990s, the failure of the party to institutionalize positions of trust and responsibility in its organization had

¹⁴ Besides reading English-language newspapers and magazines, I carried out interviews with: four present MLAs, one each from the CPI(M), Congress, Janata Dal and BJP; one Janata Dal MLC. I interviewed one former Janata Dal MLA and two former MLCs, one Janata Dal who had joined Congress and one BJP who had joined Congress. Among municipal, district and mandal level politicians, I interviewed six from Janata Dal, five from Congress, one Independent and one BJP. I received the names of politicians through academic contacts. Among academics and intellectuals I interviewed four sociologists, three anthropologists, one historian and three political scientists. Eight journalists obliged me with interviews. My thanks to all those who met and discussed with me.

resulted in demoralization. K.H. Srinivas, the political secretary to Janata Dal Chief Minister J.H. Patel, related this failure to complaints among party workers of not being respected in the party. I had asked him about the concept, *stannamana*, the honor which comes from having high political status and/or position.¹⁵ My notes from our discussion include the following:

[Srinivas argues that] *stannamana* ...[is] a concept that belongs to [what he calls] the spheres of competition within politics and will be used by party workers in complaining about their lack of capacity to accomplish anything in politics. Srinivas says that a major problem is a lack of definition of a political worker [meaning, it seems, the lack of specification of responsibilities and powers]. There is no definition of a party worker or a party cadre. So how can party workers get respect? [As things stand now] they are power-oriented and think that without a position they can't do anything. So they say that they have no *stannamana*. In this loose party structure it is hard to get respect; they feel that they are nobody (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

Srinivas talked about the interplay between notions of respect and suspicions of treachery in intra-party politics:

A person who becomes an MLA may not chose to work with those who have done a lot of work in the party and who are senior. [The latter] will feel that they did not get their due *stannamana*. The winner in a constituency may feel that these party seniors did not work for their success. They were not, an MLA will feel, instrumental in my success. [The MLA will think], "I will chose those I have trust in. I want [to work] with those I like". The rejected seniors will feel that their *stannamana* has not been recognized by those whom they supported in the election (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

The failure of party discipline in the context of deinstitutionalization made an elected official from a party vulnerable to challenges from his own party men. Srinivas continued:

¹⁵ This concept is discussed in Price, "Ideological Integration".

There is no sense of leadership. After one has won the position as MLA, others will begin immediately undermining [his] position as MLA. There is no sense of objectivity on the part of those who want to compete. It is a situation of “no holds barred”. We have a “lottery-culture” in politics.... There is no objectivity, no sense of leadership, no sense of politics as a career (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

I asked political observer Narendar Pani about the the picture of bitter rivalries and fears of treachery in party politics that one gets from reading Narasimha Rao’s autobiographical novel: “Deve Gowda’s most dangerous competitors are to be found in his taluk, Holenarsipur. He has bitter rivals at the district level [Hassan] as well. The rivalry in Hassan District has deep roots. Deve Gowda has never swept elections. He is vulnerable” (Interview, 8 May 1998, Bangalore).

In the interview Pani avoided cultural arguments without a strong element of economic determinism. He mostly talked about honor in terms of a good, not part of the quotidian construction of political interaction. In his interpretation of honor in politics, he found that “politicians have such strong and bitter rivalries and are unwilling to accept defeat because political honor is such a limited good. For many groups only politics will give honor; the only possibility for success is through politics” (Interview, 8 May 1998, Bangalore).

Narendar Pani did not use the term, “feudal”—which Narasimha Rao used—to characterize Indian politics (Narasimha Rao 1998). He argued that the mobilization of lower castes in electoral processes meant that Indian politics was more modern than that. Another political commentator, had a different view of the usefulness of the term. E. Rhagavan from *The Economic Times* argued that “a feudal system is built into politics”, meaning here the focus on personal loyalty and personality (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore). He attributed this state of affairs to the continuing influence of Congress party politics in the political landscape:

Congress has been and perhaps still is central to Indian politics. To rise in Congress it is not only necessary to win in one’s constituency; it

is necessary to be able to make an impression on the leadership, especially those in the leadership who have the ear of the supreme leader, in other words, sycophancy. In this system patronage is distributed from the top, as well as tickets to stand in elections; and the capacity to get a ticket is dependent on one's ability to please....

In order to win support of the people [in one's constituency], one has to use the levers of power (one's connections with different levels of leadership) to get benefits for your people, you have to use the leader to get benefits for one's constituency (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

I asked Raghavan about his understanding of fears of humiliation in Karnataka politics: "One has to study how politicians conduct themselves. I have yet to meet a politician who was not conscious of his position. They all want to grow, to enhance their image." (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore). Raghavan commented that if one has been an MLA for a long time and has been a minister, one "ought to command great respect": "If he is not given the respect that he deserves, that is humiliation" (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

When I asked Raghavan about suffering humiliation as an excuse to defect from a political party, he reported that he found distinctions among different kinds of defection.. He found three reasons for people to defect:

- 1) A person may leave the party to achieve a better deal, a higher position in the political hierarchy.
- 2) If I am no longer wanted in the party or somebody grabs the opportunities which come along, leaving me [on the sidelines], I may defect to another party.
- 3) I may want to leave...and give up a position to start out in a new party, starting all over again (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

Raghavan argued that politicians have a "good nose" and spot trends before others. About a former minister in the Janata Dal who had joined

Ramakrishna Hegde's non-party challenge to Janata Dal, he commented, the person "saw that the Janata Dal was not going to do well [in the forthcoming parliamentary elections] and that he had no place in the Janata Dal" (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

Having suffered humiliation can work as a public rationale for an action because causing the humiliation of one's rival is a common perception of political play. In popular cosmologies acts of revenge in return for humiliation are considered appropriate. Some informants used political language which reflected strongly the context of combat, associated with tests of honor and strength. A former mayor of Hubli-Dharwad, Panduraga Patil, often used the word "kill" to describe political rivals' attempts to undermine their competition (Interview, 28 April 1998, Hubli-Dharwad) and politics as war occasionally entered into newspaper writers' complaints about the tenor of political interaction.¹⁶ Anthropologist Shankaranaraya Rao argued that myths and the great epics played an important role in the reproduction of notions of honor, rivalry and revenge in contemporary politics. He cited a principle of political action with clear antecedents in the literature of heroic ages: "One man takes pride in ruining his rival. Others can see the ruin. You get honor by ruining the honor of somebody else" (Interview, 30 March 1998) Bangalore). Shankaranaraya Rao felt that such preoccupations had become "frenzied" (Interview, 30 March 1998, Bangalore).

Indian tradition gives place of pride for rivalry and seeking revenge—and for bringing down one's rival by hook or by crook. In Indian tradition one triumphs over the enemy. It has become a social value. Humiliation of the enemy is one's triumph. In our society competition is not orderly; you must ruin your rival. The latest example is that of the rivalry between Ramakrishan Hegde and Deve Gowda. Ramakrishna Hegde must stay with the BJP to triumph over Deve Gowda. But what does he get in the meantime? Almost nothing at the center. In the meantime the situation is unstable.... Ramakrishna Hegde is an

¹⁶ For example, see an anonymous commentary in the *Times of India*, 22 February 1998 in "Heads and Tales—The Indian Voter: The Thumb People": "That each election is increasingly assuming the jagged contours of a war is altogether another story".

intelligent man. He must have seen these problems, but his heart ached to destroy Deve Gowda (Interview, 30 March 1998, Bangalore).

Shankararaya Rao's interpretation of Ramakrishna Hegde's actions in the late 1990s was a popular one. Others with a closer view of the alternatives open to him might put more weight on Hegde's reasoning about his chance in politics, given Deve Gowda's implacable antipathy toward him. In this connection we have to consider the possible influence of news media in forming popular interpretations of motives for political action. While granting the usefulness of Shankararaya's analysis, we can also consider that the popularity of the revenge motif in discussions about politics may have been partly a reflection of media discourse.

In the course of my interviews I sometimes encountered the opinion that journalists overemphasized the drama of humiliation in Karnataka politics. In our interview, for example, Pandurage Patil argued that the media played into the public's "weakness" for "gossip" and, thus, tales of rivalry, humiliation, and revenge in politics.¹⁷ What politicians themselves have to say about the nature of preoccupation with honorific status is more reliable. The interpretation of an MLA from the CPI(M) is relevant in this context. His opinion was that both ordinary people and politicians had "feudal sentiments": "People honor any person who is in the power....Most politicians play into their feudal sentiments.... [Politicians feel] everybody should respect me" (Interview, 21 April 1998, Bangalore).

POPULAR CONCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL MOTIVATION

English-language newspapers in the late 1990s—as well as Narasimha Rao's novel—contained many references to a ceaseless and amoral appetite for "power" as the motivating force in the behavior of politicians. Apart from evidence that politicians can also be trying to better the welfare of their

¹⁷ Interview, 28 April 1998, Hubli-Dharwad. In this connection see Narasimha Rao's view of popular interest in reading newspapers: "What the government did or wanted to do, was no longer news. The only news that interested any reader was who became minister or was kicked out of the ministry. Power became a game, a source of entertainment....", *The Insider* (New Delhi: Viking, 1998), p. 538.

constituents and the prospects of their state, as a historian of political culture, I find this analysis incomplete. Political anthropologists tend not to see “power” as an absolute quantity without qualitative content. As anthropologist Shanta Pawadi Halagi noted in her study of factional politics in Karnataka: “The leader receives from his followers both direct personal admiration and indirect benefits of status in the society as a leader of a faction. Faction leaders in their external relations are often motivated more by considerations of prestige than by desires for power only” (Halagi 1991: 276). Disaggregation of motives in political action adds to the capacity to understand political styles and the tenor of many political interactions. Recourse to “power-seeking” alone cannot explain the nature of unstable relations in political parties.

A similarly nuanced view is needed in analysing the common comment in the late 1990s that people went into politics for “money” and that only “money” gave respect in Karnataka. Such observations can be understood in part with reference to changes in political culture in the state in the last half of the 20th century. In the 1990s in particular it appears that new spending opportunities, the expansion of access to television and, for some groups, new possibilities for wealth contributed to alterations in the constituents of status. Local societies had been organized in part around hierarchies based on caste status in which mutual shows of respect contributed to political integration (Tapper 1987, Price Forthcoming, Price Under review). Shankarnaraya Rao discussed the change with reference to his fieldwork about twenty years earlier:

An untouchable from one caste asked a woman from another [untouchable] caste for a lime. A panchayat meeting was called and the man was fined 5 rupees for dishonoring the woman. Shankarnaraya Rao says the money was probably used for drinks for the panchayat members and says that these concepts have become “hollow” now. “The system has broken down. People are thinking in terms of profit now. There is great change in the meanings of these terms” (Interview, 3 April 1998, Bangalore).

Under these circumstances, different groups and persons in Karnataka society—as well as in other parts of India—have been going through processes of redefining what self-respect can mean to them under conditions when conventional shows of mutual respect are in decline.

Based on her research in Hassan District in 1966-1967 Suzanne Hanchett found ostentatious display being worked into the expansion of previously simpler ceremonies (Hanchett 1975). She argued that the principles which guided these “potlatch”-like ceremonial strategies, among kin and non-kin, included “generosity, ritual rank acknowledgement and rivalry” (Hanchett 1975: 44).¹⁸ She found a smooth transformation in socio-political values, involving strong continuity with the past, in the application of ceremonies, such as marriages, to new conditions of electoral politics and economic development.

In the midst of her analysis of ostentatious display Hanchett had found preoccupation with honor, which she argued was one of the “valuables” being exchanged on ceremonial occasions (Hanchett 1975: 48):

In the case of the traditional family celebrating a wedding, honor is the general standing of the family in the community of kinsfolk and castemates; and this standing is reflected largely in the network of reciprocal caste and family ceremonies. In the case of the village patron, honor is a question of building up a local faction of followers through competitive generosity. In the case of the modern family involved in business, government, or industry, honor is largely a result of career progress.

Thirty years later meanings of terms in the language of honor were changing. The common discourse about “money” indicated preoccupation with accelerated shifts to mobile and unstable status based on or expressed by the consumption of commercialized goods. The constituents of honor in this context were unstable.

There were differing opinions about the meaning and significance of status and respect among the middle-class people I talked with—politicians, journalists, and academics, for the most part. There was a sense of despair about moral failures and general directions of development in Indian politics.¹⁹ Repeatedly I heard the expression that no person with self-respect could go into politics. I asked about this sentiment in an interview with G. T. Padaki, a senior advocate and member of the Janata Dal in Dharwad, a participant in the Quit India movement as a boy. Padaki said that politicians felt that “being elected to office gives self-respect”:

Money gives respect. Going into politics has become a profession for earning money in itself. For some people it may be the easiest way to gain wealth, since they did not acquire the skill or education to earn money another way....[I ask about vulnerability among politicians and Padaki says] maybe [this fuels] the desire to amass wealth quickly, because they are insecure. It is a vicious cycle, where one becomes increasingly insecure, making one even more desperate to amass wealth (Interview, 27 April 1998, Dharwad).

Since Karnataka voters, as elsewhere in India, often vote against incumbents and since candidates commonly go into debt in waging their campaigns, there has been an incentive to make money fast, once one is elected. Many feel compelled both to pay off their debts and to make the most of financial opportunities which accrue, before they lose the next election. This is not the place for an extensive discussion of money, corruption and politicians, but issues of ostentatious consumption and having access to large sums of cash are relevant to a discussion of ideological elements in Karnataka politics. E. Rhagavan indicated that the construction of respect both among and for politicians involved several elements, besides getting things done, achieving something in politics:

¹⁸ “Pottlatch” is the term used by anthropologists in describing the destruction of goods in status competition among Native American Indians on the Pacific Coast.

¹⁹ For newspaper commentary see, for example, Prakash Sarangi, “Changing Pattern of Parties”, *The Hindu*, 3 January 1998; Avijit Pathak, “Political Instability in India: There’s No Easy Way Out”, *Deccan Herald*, 9 January 1998; and Amal Ray, “The Lok Sabha Poll Scenario: Nothing to Cheer About”, *Deccan Herald*, 19 February 1998; N.C. Gundu Rao, “Cut-Nose-To-Spite Face Trait at Work: Hegde Picks His Dubious Ally”, *Deccan Herald*, 13 January 1998.

What is more important is whether someone gets something accomplished before another and earns respect. Having a huge bungalow and ten dogs gives respectability.... Respectability is what politicians want. Respectability comes from wealth, achievement and power. A politician often will have both wealth and power [if not achievement] (Interview, 11 May 1998, Bangalore).

The Kananada language activist and journalist Patil Puttappa pointed out that an MLA or MP had a special, “star” status, one that in countries in the West “can be given to other figures like a great ballet dancer” (Interview, 28 April 1998, Hubli-Dharwad).

Interpretations of the Conflict between Ramakrishna Hegde and H.D. Deve Gowda

The three main leaders of the Janata Dal in Karnataka in the early 1990s were H.D. Deve Gowda (a Vokkaliga from southern Karnataka), Ramakrishna Hedge (a Brahmin from the northern coast) and S.R. Bommai (a Lingayat from the northwest). They had been periodically engaged in sharp factional conflict during previous decades and both Hegde and Bommai had served as Chief Minister of the state (Gould 2003). Scholarship on Karnataka politics is in agreement that it was the willingness of especially Deve Gowda and Hegde to join forces for the Janata Dal in the Assembly and General Elections in 1996 which led to the success of the party at the polls. Hegde decided not to contest in the elections and Deve Gowda was chosen to be Chief Minister.

Hegde had played an important role in the formation of the Janata Dal as a third force in national politics in 1988 and appears to have expected to be rewarded with the position of Prime Minister for his services to the party, as well as for his intellectual and other capacities. However, the United Front, of which Janata Dal was a member, decided that the Chief Ministers of the winning alliance would choose the Prime Minister from among their number. Deve Gowda became, thus, Prime Minister of India. Upon Hegde’s death Parvati Menon wrote: “The choice of Deve Gowda as Prime Minister came as

a cruel shock for him, forcing him to speak out in anguish and a certain degree of anger against the decision” .²⁰

Shortly thereafter Deve Gowda reportedly engineered the dismissal of Hegde, with several of his supporters, from the Janata Dal, on the charge of anti-party activities.²¹ Hegde responded with the formation of a new political party, Lok Shakti, which appeared to be mostly a vehicle for himself. There followed the establishment of a non-party organization, Rashtriya Navanirman Vedita, for members of Janata Dal who were allied with Hegde, but could not leave the party without breaking rules against defections. J.H. Patel, a Lingayat who became Chief Minister when Deve Gowda went to Delhi, was caught in the middle, trying to hold the party together.

Hegde decided to join in alliance with the BJP in the General Election of 1998. In the meantime, Patel and Deve Gowda had become enemical. Another split in the Janata Dal occurred before the General Election of 1999, when the party split into Janata Dal (U), of which Patel was the leader, and Janata Dal (S), led by Deve Gowda. Janata Dal (U) joined the electoral alliance with Lok Sakti and the BJP. Congress won the Assembly Election in Karnataka, at least in part because the BJP rank and file were disheartened by the alliance with Janata Dal (U) (Gould 2003). Not only had the party in general become discredited for its intra-party squabbles and mud-slinging, but Patel's administration had acquired the reputation of being incompetent.

In the late 1990s, the relationship which was the most important in destabilizing the Janata Dal was the continuing rivalry between Deve Gowda and Hegde. Periodically Janata Dal politicians said that the party had been severely damaged with the ouster of Hegde.

²⁰ Parvati Menon, "A Politician With Elan", in *Frontline* on line , Vol. 21, Iss. 3, 2004.

²¹ According to political scientist Sandeep Shastri, after Deve Gowda arranged for C.M. Ibrahim to become president of the Karnatak Janata Dal, the Prime Minister prevailed upon him to write to the president of the Janata Dal, Laloo Prasad Yadav, saying the Hegde was engaging in anti-party activities. Laloo Prasad then expelled Hegde. Interview, 14 January 1998, Bangalore.

Ramakrishna Hegde had built a reputation as a politician of principle and had associated himself in the early 1980s with “value-based politics”, as opposed to customary wheeling and dealing. His reputation had taken a fall several times, including in 1988, when, as Chief Minister, he was accused of ordering the tapping of telephones of his partymen. He responded by stepping down from his post. Another embarrassment was the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry to investigate charges of corruption. Hegde’s alliance with the BJP as the head of Lok Shakti was a disappointment to those who had trust in him as a politician with high standards. Earlier he had been critical of the principles of the BJP, but Hegde asserted now that under the leadership of Vajpayee the party had been moving away from extreme positions.

As a young party which was mainly associated with the person of its leader, the only hope for survival for Lok Shakti was electoral alliance with a greater party. It appears that Hegde refused to consider allying with the United Front. After Hegde died, former Prime Minister I.K.Gujral, a friend of Hegde, said that the latter had hoped to be allied with the Congress Party and had turned to the BJP only when circumstances in the Congress made alliance there impossible.²² Since Hegde had spoken out against dynastic rule in political parties, observers argued that Sonia Gandhi was opposed to his reincorporation in the Congress fold.

In the late 1990s many people argued that, whatever expectations Ramakrishna Hegde had of a desirable position at the center by joining the BJP, his other agenda was the destruction of the Janata Dal, in revenge for his being expelled from the party. It seemed to many that more important than breaking the principled mold in which Hegde had cast himself was the destruction of the career of Deve Gowda. H.S. Balram, Resident Editor for *The Times of India* in Bangalore, stated the case in an article about Hegde’s options in the run-up to the General Election:

Hegde has already made up his mind to reject this suitor [Janata Dal].
He is unable to forget the humiliation piled on him by Mr Gowda vis-à-

²² R. Prasannam, “Ramakrishna Hegde (1926-2004): A Brilliant Mind”, *This Week*, 25 January 2004.

vis the Dal. Rather, his main aim now is to decimate the Dal. Some Dal men, including Gowda's arch rival R.L. Jalappa, are said to be in touch with him to speed up the process. Hegde is, however, ready to reconsider his stand if Dal ditches Gowda.²³

The great rivalry between Deve Gowda and Ramakrishna Hegde played itself out, in "gossip" and in print (See Ruud 2003 on gossip and political discourse). Deve Gowda, rough-spoken and quick to anger, representative for farmers' interests, made a colorful contrast with the elegant and cultivated Hegde. Deve Gowda recognized the contrast when he told a press conference that "having a good and cultured family background was not enough to be successful in politics. One should live amidst poor farmers, till land and tend cows and buffaloes".²⁴ The contrast was epitomized in the story which people told explaining Deve Gowda's dismissal of Hegde from the Janata Dal. When Hegde said in public that the latter was not fit to be Prime Minister, he elaborated on Deve Gowda's presumed deficiencies in a manner which highlighted his own wide knowledge. The dismissal of Hegde, in popular renditions of the scenario, was Deve Gowda's revenge.

The well-known novelist Anantha Murthy was one of the persons who tried to arrange a reconciliation between the two men:

[From my notes] Anantha Murthy is a friend of Ramakrishna Hegde and has been in politics himself. Hegde admits that he should not have said the Deve Gowda did not know the map of India. In the meantime Deve Gowda says that Hegde, as a Brahmin was not prepared to see a dark-skinned farmer of a low caste become the Prime Minister of India. Murthy points out that this is Deve Gowda putting a personal quarrel into the discourse of the time, conflict between high caste and low caste groups.

Murthy tried to bring the two men together. He asked Hegde why he was still put off by Deve Gowda and Hegde responded that "When I put

²³ "Wedding Bells Ring, but Hegde keeps suitors waiting", *Sunday Times of India*, 28 December 1997.

out my hand to congratulate him as Prime Minister, he did not take it". When Deve Gowda was asked about his response to Hegde, Deve Gowda replied, "But he did not come to my dinner party". Hegde reminded Murthy [when asked about the continuing conflict] that he is, when all is said and done, only a human being, capable of being hurt and offended (Interview, 8 May 1998, Bangalore).

It may be questioned whether Ramakrishna Hegde, as a (Havik) Brahmin, was subject to notions of honor. The received wisdom is that Brahmins have been preoccupied with status based on caste membership, not with the more fluid status of honor associated with heroism in warfare. However, the Havik Brahmins I interviewed in Uttara Kannada were well familiar with honorific values, discussing with me the lexicon of honor.²⁵ The two local Havik Brahmin politicians I interviewed knew honor as dominance, while the emphasis of non-politicians tended to be on *mariyata* as rules of courtesy, *gaurava* as respect one earned and *mana* as inner character. G.S. Hegde Ajjibal, former MLA, journalist and confidant of Ramakrishna Hegde, was concerned to associate his friend with the moral connotations of honor, rather than "undemocratic" dominance and plays of rivalry and revenge. Ajjibal said that supporters of Ramakrishna faulted him with being "too much concerned with his honor", for example, when he stepped down from his position as Chief Minister in 1984 and then again in 1988 (Interview, 26 December 1997, Sirsi). Sociologist N. Jayaram, in a less sanguine frame of mind, suggested that this moral connotation that was part of Hegde's construction of his image:

Hegde used his honor strategically in the telephone tapping case. He had instructed the police to tap the telephones of his own party-men, including Deve Gowda, and the opposition. When he was exposed, he owned up, having no way out, and resigned as Chief Minister. You made a claim when you are challenged that you are serving a moral principle. Thus you can save face, as did Hegde (Interview, 11 April 1998, Bangalore).

²⁴ Anon, "UF Won't Need Cong Support [sic]: Gowda", *Deccan Herald*, 24 January 1998.

As Parvati Menon observes, “These acts of resignation may not have impressed his critics, but they enhanced his status in the public perception” (Menon 2004). That Hegde was concerned with honor as more than as moral principle is suggestion in an interview he gave in New Delhi in January 1998:

Asked if he still held rancour in his heart for the break with the UF [United Front], Mr. Hegde said he would have gradually retired from active politics once Mr Deve Gowda became the premier, “had it not been for the arbitrary manner in which I was expelled... Then it became a question of saving my honour”.

One way was to launch a party [he continued] since his followers wanted a platform.²⁶

Gopal Karanth of ISEC reported that Hegde did not talk about being humiliated, not even when he was dismissed from the Janata Dal:

Hegde did not respond by talking about how humiliated he was. He made his humiliation that of others. He made it everybody's business by talking about how Deve Gowda was unfit to be Prime Minister, about how he couldn't speak two words of English together, how he did not know how to figure inflation... Hegde [tried to make] Deve Gowda lose his base, even among his own [Vokkaliga] caste....

Hegde never talks about his humiliation. He let others talk about what Deve Gowda did to him. Hegde's men, not Hegde, are the ones that demand enquiries about Deve Gowda. Hegde's friends have filed suits against Deve Gowda (Interview, 9 March 1998, Bangalore).

Observers of Deve Gowda found a more direct play on his part in the politics of rivalry and revenge. He was sometimes accused of doing “panchayat politics” (as when he expelled Ramakrishna Hegde) and behaving like a “palegar”. To illustrate a point about Deve Gowda as doing rural style politics

²⁵ Interviews, among others, with Ramnath, Janata Dal member, former President of the Mandal Panchayat, Sirsi, 25 December 1997; Bhat, areca nut plantation owner and Ramchander, priest, 26 December 1997, Uttar Kannada. Thanks to Neelambar Hatti for arranging for interviews and interpreting when necessary.

²⁶ Mahendra Ved, “BJP is an Evolving Party, Its Attitudes are Changing: Hegde”, *The Times of India*, 11 January 1998.

at the state level, political scientist P. S. Jayaramu offered that Deve Gowda had been quoted in the news as saying, “I am a mad man. I will take revenge and then I will take rest”. At one point in a campaign Deve Gowda had supposedly threatened to break Ramakrishna Hegde’s leg if he came to do politics in Hassan District (Interview, 1 April 1998, Bangalore).

In a speech in January 1998, Hegde made much of the palegar image in discussing the style of politics in Janata Dal. He was speaking on the occasion of welcoming to the Lok Shakti a former minister and president of the Bangalore City District Committee of the Janata Dal, Mr. M. Raghupathy:

Without mentioning anyone of them by name, he said that there was no future for the Dal with a “palegar at the held of affairs. There is palegar darbar in Karnataka”. So far he had been considered to be a soft person. But he could also prove that he could strike decisively at the crucial moment. “Such a moment has arrived now. Till now I was only waiting but throwing hints”.

The atmosphere in the Janata Dal was stifling and leaders such as Mr. Raghupathy had felt it. It was no longer a democratic organisation with “palegarism” ruling the roost. There is one big palegar, he said alluding to Mr. Deve Gowda, and some small palegars. Like the palegars or chieftains of the past, who never cared for the people, the palegars of the Janata dal [sic] too were interested only about their families, friends and the sycophants around them.²⁷

I asked Gopal Karanth about the meaning of “palegar politics”. He listed three characteristics:

1. You just insist on what you want and do not take others into consideration. You do not take into account past actions, but say what will serve your interests at a point in time. There are expressions such as a person “walks like a palegar”, arrogant and proud, or that a person talks like a palegar.

²⁷ Anon, “Now Hegde sets deadline to Dal Men”, *The Hindu*, 2 January 1998.

2. You use your family and kin. This we can call the dynastic aspect, but it refers to all close kin. They will be brought up with you.
3. Like Deve Gowda, you move very much within the orbit of caste. He has used caste the way few others have (Interview, 9 March 1998, Bangalore).

The qualities which Karanth outlined showed up in comments which others made. Madan Mohan, a journalist with *The Hindu*, remarked that in 1983, when Janata Dal was trying to form a government, Ramakrishna Hegde and S.R. Bommai were frustrated in trying to work with Deve Gowda: “He was his own man, not really willing cooperate, just having his own goal for the top political position” (Interview, 28 April 1998, Hubli-Dharwad). When a Gowda advocate and former MLC with the Janata Dal argued that he was consistently sidelined by Deve Gowda, he gave fuel to the image of Deve Gowda as a rural chieftain. He complained about the former Prime Minister’s demands for unquestioning loyalty: “He supported people who were like dogs before him. Every leader expects loyalty, but an independent thinking person who can speak is not being liked” (Interview, 28 May 1998, Mysore).

An image of Deve Gowda as a rough and tumble chieftain who used his caste connections and his family in an undemocratic fashion had become common by the winter of 1997-1998.. His enemies used the image as rhetorical weaponry to further discredit him, implying criticism of the politics of rivalry and revenge. This practice included as well criticism of the political style of his two political sons, H.D. Revanna and H.D. Kumaraswamy. These were charged with having been heavy-handed in their protection of their father’s interests which he was in Delhi under the United Front regime.²⁸ Kumaraswamy complained that the Transport Minister, P.G.R. Sindhia and the state Janata Dal President, B.L. Shankar, had gone so far as to refuse to refute the rumor that his brother, H.D. Revanna, had physically assaulted Sindhia. Sindhia and Shankar had opportunities to set the story straight, but persisted in giving an impression, said Kumaraswamy, “that the family had

²⁸ H.S. Balram, “Sons Play Spoilsport in Gowda-Patel Honeymoon”, in *The Times of India*, 9 November 1997.

created a suffocating atmosphere in the party”.²⁹ Besides complaints of humiliation, defectors or would-be defectors often gave as a reason for leaving a party that they were being suffocated politically because of the domination of one or more powerful figures. Former Minister Jivijaya and a large number of his followers joined Lok Shakti in December 1997, giving occasion for a speech:

[Mr. Jivajaya] devoted a major portion of his speech to launching a broadside on Mr. Deve Gowda and accused him of stifling Vokkaliga politicians who held out promise of growing politically.... “The welfare of Vokkaliga community is not [the] exclusive right of some”.³⁰

When three Janata Dal ministers and three other party legislators joined the “non-political” Rashtriya Navanirman Vedithe in January, 1998, they claimed that Deve Gowda had converted the party into his “personal fiefdom”.³¹ They engaged thereby in an implicit discourse on the constituents of democratic behavior, joining their voice in the chorus which described Deve Gowda as autocratic and dictatorial.³² Ironically, they themselves acted to reproduce the modern politics of honor when, at the same time, they complained that in the Janata Dal they had been “humiliated”.³³

Deve Gowda was infuriated by the criticism against him and credited news media with blowing up incidents and details out of proportion to their overall importance. An example of the treatment he received is the content of an article in *The Hindu* in March 1998 entitled, “RS Polls: Gowda’s Attitude Shocks Dal Leadership”. The journalist reported that Deve Gowda had been adamant, against all appeals by fellow party leaders, that a Gowda caste man from Hassan District receive the party nomination to the Rajya Sabha: “According to a senior party leader, ‘it is not Mr. Javare Gowda’s service to the party, but his unflinching loyalty to Mr. Deve Gowda that got him the

²⁹ Anon., “Kumaraswamy Quits JD Post, Blasts Sindhia, Shankar”, *The Times of India*, 9 April 1998.

³⁰ Anon., “Jivijaya Joins Lok Shakti”, *The Hindu*, 11 December 1997.

³¹ Anon., “3 MLAs Follow Deshpande, Jigajinagi, Sarnaik”, *Deccan Herald*, 21 January 1998.

³² See, for example, the comments of MLC K.B. Shanappa, Janata Dal’s parliamentary board chairman, quoted in Anon., “Dal Gets Another Jolt as Shanappa Joins Vedithe”, *The Times of India*, 5 February 1998.

³³ Gayathri Nivas, “Afraid to Strike”, *Deccan Herald* 25 January 1998.

nomination”³⁴ *The Times of India* gave Deve Gowda’s son, Kumaraswamy, a chance to defend his father in an interview three weeks later. He explained that the former Prime Minister had initially proposed that the two Rajya Sabha seats be given to members of the backward classes and minorities, but when party stalwart S.R. Bommai’s name was suggested, it was decided that the other seat should go to a Vokkaliga:

Mr Javare Gowda has been a sincere worker of the party for the last 25 years, and in Hassan district, it was decided that the Rajya Sabha seat should be given to him when my father vacated it.

Besides, if Mr Shankar [who had complained bitterly about the decision] had been given the seat, it would have led to another debate on why a defeated candidate was considered for the Upper House.³⁵

Deve Gowda’s resentment of his treatment in the press may have been fueled by the relatively mild treatment given to Ramakrishna Hegde, whom the press tended to “like”.³⁶ As he said during campaigning, Deve Gowda was proud of his record as Prime Minister, for what he had achieved for the nation and for his state.

I have a sense of immense satisfaction in having fulfilled poll-eve promises, and in having resolved many vexed issues such as the Indo-Bangladesh dispute over the sharing of Ganga waters and agreements between India and Nepal on hydel power projects, that had been pending for long.³⁷

Deve Gowda believed that his enemies in Congress and the BJP in Karnataka were conspiring to “finish him off” politically: “even though I have not done anything to tarnish the image of the people of Karnataka”.³⁸ Gowda tried to make potential voters proud of having had a Kannada Prime Minister and used the notion of Kannada self-respect in his campaign appeals before the General Election in 1998:

³⁴ S. K. Ramoo, “RS Polls: Gowda’s Attitude Shock Dal Leadership”, *The Hindu*, 22 March 1998.

³⁵ Naheed Ataulia, “Some Forces are Gunning for the Gowda Family”, *The Times of India*, 11 April 1998.

³⁶ Sandeep Shastri argued that Hegde was “overprojected” in a generally friendly media, interview, 3 April 1998, Bangalore.

³⁷ Anon. “Gowda Sees Conspiracy by Congress, BJP”, *The Hindu*, 10 February 1998.

[I]n the name of the self-respect of the people of Karnataka. “Please vote for Dal, if you are true progenies of Goddess Bhuvaneshwari or if Kannada blood flows in you....”³⁹

Gowda campaigned saying that the political parties in Karnataka had “never felt proud of him” and pointed out that parties in Punjab were not fielding a candidate against then Prime Minister Gujral as a “gesture” of “appreciation” for his coming from their state.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

There are strenuous difficulties in managing competing social groups, segments and regions in the political landscape of Karnataka (Gould 2003). These difficulties have been accentuated by touchy issues of status, including preoccupation with personal honor and the desire for respect. Politicians, at either local or state levels, are not equally preoccupied and the preoccupations which exist play themselves out in different ways with varying levels of intensity.

In pointing to a complex of values and concepts in political action, I am not making an argument for a general lack of rationality among politicians. Sociologist N. Jayaram argued in an interview that there are “operational rules of the game which are limited [in their operation] by cultural elements in political action” (Interview, 11 April 1998, Bangalore). He took the point of view of politics as a universal set of games. My approach is that, as far as competition among leading politicians is concerned, the rules of the game can be set according to assumptions which are specific to place, time and culture.

As indicated above, the management of these culturally specific interests takes much time and energy. V.N. Torgal, former private secretary to the leader of the opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council, H.K. Patil,

³⁸ Anon. “Gowda Sees”.

³⁹ In *The Hindu*, 8 February 1998..

⁴⁰ Anon., “Gowda Sees”.

reported that the demands on Patil were heavy in managing competition and conflict at the same time as he strove to accomplish tasks of governing and serving his constituency. Patil, he said “works fourteen hours a day and thinks only of his work” (Interview, 29 April 1998, Hubli-Dharwad). As Congress Party politicians pointed out in the spring of 1998, Chief Minister J.H. Patel was neglecting administrative tasks in his difficult pursuit of holding his party together. The *Deccan Herald* quoted a Congress spokesman in January, 1998, as saying, “Instead of attending to administrative work...[J.H. Patel] was wasting his time trying to make his party stay together” (*Deccan Herald*, 22 January 1998) Much of the electorate was not impressed by what was transpiring in Janata Dal and perceived failures of governance. The party suffered badly at the polls at the General Election that spring.

Questions may be raised regarding my use of the word “ideology” in referring to the complex of ideas, values and symbols in the politics of honor. Some—many?—of the understandings and assumptions for action may have been tacit in the behavior which I reported. Thus, the word ideology may not adequately characterize the phenomena which I discuss. I am guided in my usage by a common principle in social settings in which practices of honor and respect are reproduced, including kin clusters, institutions of worship and intergroup relations in rural society. These practices are guided by the conviction that personal and group welfare is obtained through cooperation among persons in relationships of inequality. This, however, is a topic I take up elsewhere (Price Under review; see also Tapper 1987).

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