# TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED ELITE POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN INDIA

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**ABSTRACT**

A unique feature of Indian democracy has been the gradual disengagement of its elites from electoral politics. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are now helping to reverse this trend. This article surveys the diverse ways in which India's elites harness ICTs to engage the political system. Elites have used ICTs to help with the formation of new political parties, organization of protests and social movements, registration of voters, provision of election-related information and to improve policy formation. ICTs enable elites to overcome various barriers to political engagement rapidly but do not guarantee sustained mobilization. India's elites also demonstrate a preference for neutral, non-partisan reforms that may limit their ability to influence political outcomes over time.

**I. The Puzzle of Elite Political Participation in India**

India's democracy has a unique feature: Its urban middle and upper classes (hereinafter elites) vote less than its poor (Yadav 2009; Ghose 1997). India's elites are numerically significant: they constituted about 30 million households in 2010, i.e., around one-eighth of the population (Kapur 2010). Yet they have withdrawn from electoral politics (Corbridge and Harriss 2000). The social base of political participation has distinctly shifted toward rural areas and historically disadvantaged communities. In contrast to the apathy toward voting in affluent areas of India's cities (Varshney 2000), economically and socially disadvantaged sections of India draw strength from their rights as citizens and use the vote as a "weapon of the weak" (Yadav 2009).

Elites' withdrawal of elites from political participation is a recent phenomenon. Historically, they were at the forefront of India's struggle for independence from Britain and nation building thereafter (Varma 1998). In terms of Yadav's (1999) classification of India's electoral phases, elites dominated the leadership of the governing Congress party during the first phase, 1952-67. Their hold declined as the Green Revolution led to an increase in the economic and political strength of farming communities. India's second electoral phase (from 1967 till the 1990s) saw the successful political entry of the "Other Backward Classes" (or OBCs, referring to groups that were historically on the lower rungs of the social status, economic, and educational attainment ladders) and Dalits (the former untouchable castes, also marked by low levels of economic and educational attainment).

India's third electoral phase, from the 1990s onwards, has seen national parties decline and regional parties strengthen, ensuring coalition governments. This phase has been characterized by political corruption and the decline of ideology, resulting in disinterest and

cynicism among elites with regard to politics (Gowda &Sridharan 2007). However, during this period, India's elites have continued to influence policy through their presence in the bureaucracy, the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the legal profession (Mawdsley 2004).

India is now seeing a resurgence of elite interest in politics, partly because of major policy changes affecting their economic interests. Economic liberalization (or deregulation) generated tremendous economic benefits so elites are supportive of parties that favor liberalization (Sridharan 2004; Sridharan 2008). Simultaneously, caste-based quotas in education and government employment have been raised to 50 per cent, reducing the opportunities available to candidates from the "forward" classes, who dominate India's elites. Jaffrelot (2008) therefore suggests that one plausible method of defining India's elites is on the basis of their shared opposition to caste-based quotas.

Elites' lack of sustained political mobilization has prevented them from countering quotas politically, though they have affected media discourse substantially (Varadarajan 2006). Their 'distaste for politics and politicians' has come in the way of their countering 'pro-poor welfare spending (such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)) and an expansion in legislation guaranteeing economic rights (such as the right to education)' (Kapur 2010, p. 155).However, in the larger picture, such policies promote inclusive growth and thus help defuse opposition to economic liberalization, ensuring that elites continue to benefit from the government's pro-market policies. Elites' ability to influence political outcomes has recently increased because the 2009 "delimitation" (redistricting) of constituencies to account for population movements has enhanced urban electoral representation at the expense of rural

constituencies. Elites are now decisive in more than hundred urban constituencies—nearly a fifth of the seats in parliament.

This article aims to demonstrate that India's elites are re-engaging with political participation (Sharma 2009a) but in non-traditional ways. Specifically, they are utilizing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to mobilize politically, influence policy and regain some measure of control over a changing political sphere. In harnessing ICTs to further their activities, India's elites have the advantage of being on the right side of the country's "digital divide" (Keniston 2004). Developments in ICTs, such as social networking, have enabled them to come together virtually before mobilizing their constituency on the ground. These developments thus add another dimension to Fernandes' (2006, p. 182) observation that India's middle class is engaged in new forms of political action as part of 'a continual struggle to reclaim the terms of democratic politics from subordinated social groups'.

## II. The Diversity of India's Elites and Their Modes of Engagement with Governance Processes

India's elites are diverse in their internal composition, and the balance between different groups has changed over time. Kapur (2010) notes three distinct patterns in the rapid growth of elites: their primary employment has shifted from the public sector to the private sector; there is a growing section of middle-class entrepreneurs who are used to risk and variable income in contrast to secure, salaried careers; and the vast majority are first-generation middle class, having ascended to this status due to India's recent economic growth.

Sitapaty (2011) groups India's elites into four categories: Gandhians, Independent Left, Legal Activists, and "India Shining,[i]" a group that has been empowered by India's economic

liberalization. It is appropriate to add one more category: Professionally-staffed NGOs that are overtly non-ideological but are committed to development and poverty alleviation. These NGOs are a contrast to India's traditional civic associations which relied on unpaid volunteers. They play an active role in various domains of social policy, e.g., health and education, where governments have substantially failed to deliver, and often work in formal partnership with government to deliver services to needy populations.

Gandhians and the Independent Left have been at the forefront of people's movements, focused on the disadvantaged, viewed the private sector with hostility and used the tactics of protest and civil disobedience (Aiyar 2007). Interestingly, the Independent Left has leveraged ICTs to network with activists globally enabling it to add international pressure to their protests against large dams and the environmental impacts of a Coca Cola factory in Kerala state (Aiyar 2007).

Legal Activists utilize India's judicial system to affect public policy. Their efforts have been aided by the willingness of some judges (especially on the Supreme Court) to entertain "public interest litigations" (PILs) on issues including environmental protection, rights of sexual minorities and investigation of corruption. Legal Activism has led to courts enacting policy on politically contentious issues instead of confining themselves to their constitutional role of interpreting the law. Legal Activists are another example of how India's elites are dominated by professionals.

Overall, Legal Activists, Gandhians, the Independent Left and NGOs constitute a small fraction of elites but have effectively focused their energies on issues that affect the poor and marginalized, thus refuting the charge that their activism is limited to elite concerns (Gupta

2008). Together, they can be credited with influencing the government to introduce "rights-based" public policies such as the Right to Information law, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the Right to Education law, etc. Leading activists now serve on India's National Advisory Council which significantly influences the agenda of the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

The "India Shining" category is made up of Kapur's (2010) rapidly-growing and private-sector-oriented professional class and constitutes the largest segment of India's elites. This group's emphasis on education and professional careers has provided it enormous economic benefits in a globalized knowledge economy. Its worldview has been transformed by its entrepreneurial success. Its icons are information technology pioneers both in Indian cities like Bangalore and in Silicon Valley where some of its members have settled and thrived. Its views dominate discourse in English language media (Fernandes and Heller 2006) (which are dominated by upper caste elites (Varadarajan 2006)).

Sitapaty (2011) argues that the "India Shining" segment has a virulent dislike of India's political class because: 1. It values good governance in the form of efficient service delivery and infrastructure provision, which has not been forthcoming in recent decades. 2. The political class is now dominated by the populous lower castes, while the "India Shining" segment is mainly drawn from the erstwhile upper castes, thus creating a sense of disenfranchisement. 3. The political class emphasizes the priorities of those who have not benefited from India's economic liberalization and allocates substantial resources toward them. Together, these factors push the "India Shining" segment toward disengagement from the realm of electoral politics, rationally choosing exit because it lacks voice therein (Kapur 2010).

However, the "India Shining" segment has not disengaged from society. It has shifted focus to 'associational activism' (Harriss 2007, p. 2719) and has energized civil society by forming resident welfare associations and groups that aim to reform urban governance. Governments have responded by explicitly partnering with such groups in the management of local public services, which suggests that they are able to engage the political system effectively through this parallel avenue (Mooij & Tawa Lama-Rewal 2009). Leading members of the "India Shining" segment have been involved in shaping government policy and have been criticized for emphasizing elite priorities over those of the urban poor (Ghosh 2005). While citizen participation is part of this segment's discourse, Jaffrelot (2008) characterizes its political culture as one with more faith in managers than in parliamentarians (a corollary of its belief that economic liberalization and private sector managerial efficiency are responsible for India's growth). The central theme of the "India Shining" segment's discourse is 'if Indians can succeed in building top quality companies, why cannot they rebuild India's moribund state?' (Sitapaty 2011, p. 42).

Looking forward, Kapur (2010) predicts that given India's urban elites' growing numbers, they will wake up to their potential political power by eventually reengaging with electoral politics. However, he argues that because elites are heterogeneous, the likelihood of their indulging in collective action to pursue their interests is modest. Mooij & Tawa Lama-Rewal (2009) describe attempts by elites to build coalitions of resident welfare associations to support their own candidates in elections to local bodies: Only one such candidate, contesting as an independent, managed to win in Mumbai's civic polls and all such candidates in Delhi faced defeat. Mooij & Tawa Lama-Rewal (2009) also provide instances of elite organizations building

bridges with other local groups to create larger coalitions around issues of local concern such as privatization of water. They see a reform-oriented civil society as now more willing to engage with political society and expect that this will lead to more accountability, transparency and participation in local politics.

Jaffrelot (2008) argues that elites offer trivial excuses to justify their low participation in voting: 1. Voting entails waiting in line and some discomfort. 2. Elite voters' names are often missing from electoral rolls. 3. Impersonation sometimes poses a problem. Jaffrelot (2008) points to a more serious practical challenge affecting elite political mobilization: It is difficult to reach them during door-to-door canvassing because they typically live in apartment blocks or residences protected by security guards. Thus, any political entrepreneur attempting to mobilize India's elites as an explicit political force has to find a way to overcome all these challenges. This is where ICTs come to the rescue because they provide online platforms for political debate, channels for connecting with elite voters virtually, and technologies to greatly ease the pain points discouraging voting turnout.


**III. ICTs and Their Role in Elite Political Engagement**

In this section, I describe a range of ICT-enabled initiatives that increase elite influence over political outcomes. These initiatives challenge Kapur's (2010) prediction that elites will find it difficult to mobilize politically and also address the pain points discouraging elite electoral participation identified by Jaffrelot (2008). Thus, methodologically, the null hypothesis for the analysis is that elites do not engage politically. To test this hypothesis, English language print media was scanned for the period 2006-2011. This data identified twelve significant instances

of ICT-enabled elite political mobilization in India. For a smaller sample of these instances, in-depth unstructured qualitative interviews were conducted to identify mechanisms through which ICTs channelized elite interests into political mobilization. This data provides sufficient examples of ICT-enabled elite mobilization to reject the null hypothesis that India's elites will not engage politically (Kapur 2010).

**A. Elite Activism and Political Mobilization using ICTs**

*Youth for Equality*

In 2006, Youth for Equality was the first elite organization to use ICTs for political mobilization. It was formed as an online organization in reaction to the government's move to introduce quotas for OBCs in premier government-run institutions of higher education. A few volunteers, distributed across cities, coordinated online discussions and offline demonstrations against the government using the Youth for Equality website as a platform. Youth for Equality rapidly generated virtual branches across India and in parts of the world to which Indian students and computer professionals have migrated. However, once the reservation policy was challenged in the Supreme Court (which eventually ruled in favor of the government), Youth for Equality lost its momentum as a political movement. Thereafter some members of the organization contested local body elections in Mumbai and a parliament seat in New Delhi but were unsuccessful (Sharma 2009b).

*Lok Paritran*

In 2005-2006, a group of young professionals formed *Lok Paritran* – a political party promising meritocratic practices in place of caste-based quotas. Educated at the premier Indian Institutes of Technology, these professionals mobilized membership and funding through the

Internet and spawned support groups on various social networking sites. Lok Paritran followed the unique strategy of plunging into the electoral fray in different parts of the country where elections were being held with the hope that the excitement associated with elections would draw volunteers and supporters. When Lok Paritran contested state elections in Tamil Nadu, it drew enough votes in two urban constituencies to cause the defeat of powerful politicians from mainstream parties (Gowda 2007). Lok Paritran's anti-quota agenda and use of the Internet enabled it to attract large numbers of campaign volunteers and earned it considerable votes in Mylapore, an urban constituency (Muthalaly 2006). However, while ICTs enabled Lok Paritran to organize elites rapidly, it has since splintered and ceased to be relevant politically.

*Bengaluru Unites*

Bengaluru Unites was a spontaneously-formed group that organized a series of simultaneous protests across Bangalore city in 2009. Its formation was triggered by attacks on women in the name of 'culture' and 'tradition' by the Sri Rama Sene, a right-wing organization, that had announced it would launch a 'moral policing' campaign in Bangalore. Bengaluru Unites activists utilized the Internet and mass media to successfully organize simultaneous, geographically-dispersed protests across Bangalore against the Sri Rama Sene. Thousands of college students and working professionals, including many who had never indulged in political action before, participated in these protests (Srinivas 2009).

*The Pink Chaddi Campaign*

The Sri Rama Sene's activities also provoked another uniquely creative use of ICTs in political mobilization. A few women activists calling themselves 'The Consortium of Pub-Going, Loose and Forward Women' set up a group on the social networking site, Facebook. There they

launched the 'Pink Chaddi' campaign whereby they urged supporters to mail pink lingerie (as a gesture of contempt) to the Sri Rama Sene. Membership of this Facebook group rapidly shot to 58,000 and hundreds of parcels of pink lingerie were mailed to the Sri Rama Sene. In the face of protests and media attention, the Sri Rama Sene backed down from its plan of 'forcibly marrying off men and women seen together on Valentine's Day' in Bangalore (Gupta 2009).

*The Free Binayak Sen Campaign*

The Independent Left has also discovered the power of social networking platforms like Facebook to propagate a cause, as demonstrated by the "Free Binayak Sen" campaign. A doctor and human rights activist, Sen had been arrested in 2007 in Chattisgarh state on charges of links with Maoists or Naxalites (armed rebels who are considered as terrorists by the government). A lower court convicted him for life on charges of sedition. In 2011, Sen was granted bail by the Supreme Court which ruled that the sedition charges against him were not tenable.

While Sen was in jail, his supporters launched Facebook pages that catalyzed rallies calling for his release. One Facebook page counted more than 10,000 "members" (D'Silva *et al* 2011). In addition to demonstrations across India, the Facebook campaign and online networking with civil society groups internationally culminated in protest rallies across many cities in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom calling for Sen's release. Participants at these rallies included activists fighting for marginalized and indigenous communities who saw Sen's situation as similar to their own (Press Trust of India 2011).

**B. Elite Voter Registration**

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an independent, constitutionally-sanctioned authority responsible for registering voters and conducting free and fair elections. It has

experimented with online registration subject to physical verification of voters' claimed place of residence by ECI representatives (Gowda 2007). The ECI has been appreciated for enhancing transparency because its website contains judicial references, election laws, and information that candidates must compulsorily declare. However, urban electoral laws have substantial flaws. People remain unregistered because of migration or absence during ECI verification (Ramanathan 2008). Dissatisfaction with the registration process has been identified as a key barrier inhibiting voting by elites. To redress this problem, a private corporation and an NGO launched an ICT-driven initiative to make voter registration easier:

*Jaago Re*

*Jaago Re* ("Wake Up!" in Hindi) is the tag that Tata Tea uses in its advertisements. In 2008, a year before parliamentary elections, Tata Tea teamed up with the NGO Janaagraha to launch the *Jaago Re* One Billion Votes campaign to combat voter apathy. This all-India effort was primarily conducted through a website which provided citizens with relevant registration-related information. The campaign targeted first-time voters and billed itself as a movement for change via 'active participation in the democratic process.' Website users were provided with information regarding the status of their voter registration and news about the elections and candidates.

Tata Tea treated *Jaago Re* as a component of its marketing strategy and not as a corporate social responsibility initiative. It engaged a leading agency to launch television and print advertisements. Overall, the campaign assisted in over 600,000 voter registrations across India and its website received 16 million visitors and 5 million registrations (Pinglay 2009).

Given India's urban-rural digital divide (Singh 2010) and the urban focus of *Jaago Re*, elites would arguably form the majority of voters registered through this campaign.

*Citizens Initiative*

In 2006, a neutral, non-partisan group called Citizens Initiative made an attempt to harness ICTs to mobilize voters (Gowda 2007). Its aim was to register voters for the Bangalore Graduates' constituency – a unique electoral constituency for the Karnataka Legislative Council, where the electorate was restricted to college graduates living in Bangalore city.  Registration was a cumbersome process involving provision of proof of graduation to election authorities, resulting in less than five percent of potentially eligible voters participating in these elections (Shile 2006).

Citizens Initiative launched an online voter enrolment campaign called "End the Apathy." It targeted the thousands of graduate voters employed in Bangalore's ICT companies. It persuaded CEOs of these companies to send an email to their employees exhorting them to enrol as voters for the Graduates' constituency. Company human resource departments were roped in to assist the campaigns.  Citizens Initiative's website provided information about the election and e-enabled registration. Voters who enrolled through this process were promised election-related information. However, Citizens Initiative was limited in its impact, and it registered only around 4000 voters – a fraction of the numbers enrolled by mainstream political parties using offline methods.

**C. Elite Voting Choices and Information Access**

Given the proliferation of parties, voters find it difficult to obtain detailed information about candidates and manifestos, despite the presence of active mainstream media. Concerns

about the quality of representatives have increased because parties sometimes field candidates with criminal records. Voters find it hard to obtain data that would enable them to make judgments on whether candidates had indulged in corruption. Voters thus need access to information about candidates' and parties' promises and performance. An independent NGO called Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) filed a PIL in the Supreme Court, and in response, the Court ruled in favor of disclosure, and declared that candidates must release complete information on their financial, educational and criminal background (Sastry 2004). This verdict was enacted into law by parliament so all candidates have to file affidavits containing this information along with their nomination papers. ADR then joined hands with other non-partisan NGOs to spearhead a 'National Election Watch' campaign to share candidate-related information with the public, partly through the use of ICTs.

*National Election Watch*

National Election Watch's website provides voters with: (i) Information on candidates' finances, education and criminal records (ii) Feedback from the public about the performance of elected representatives; (iii) Data on the state of a constituency measured on human development index parameters; (iv) Ratings of representatives based on peoples' comments and demonstrable improvements in their constituencies; and (v) A channel to provide feedback to elected representatives about constituents' priorities and concerns.

Although its impact on voters is hard to measure, National Election Watch has helped improve the quality of political representation. For instance, the Chief Minister of Bihar state refused to include anyone with a criminal record in his cabinet (Vishnoi 2008). The ready availability of candidate information online allows the public to monitor this promise. National

Election Watch information is also used by media to identify potential understatement of assets by candidates.

*Other Information-Focused ICT Initiatives: Empower India and Smart Vote*

Another Internet-based information-focused effort similar to National Election Watch was the Liberty Institute's Empower India campaign. Interestingly, beyond providing access to candidate-related information to elites, this campaign saw its data being utilized by mass media catering to rural India (Bawa 2009). Another civil society initiative that emerged during the 2009 parliamentary election was 'Smart Vote,' a campaign that posted candidates' responses to detailed questionnaires on their website and also teamed up with a television channel to conduct multi-candidate debates, possibly for the first time in India. Smart Vote's website also had information about the performance of some elected representatives in Parliament.

**D. ICT-enabled Elite Engagement with Policy Makers**

*Parliamentary Research Service*

Parliament sessions are filmed and broadcast on a state-run television channel. Still, detailed information about bills being considered by parliament is not easy for the public to access and relying on the media can be affected by insufficient depth and partisan viewpoints. Even members of parliament (MPs) sometimes have limited information about what they are voting for or against (Yadav 2008) because bills are often passed in a hurry and parties sometimes use a "whip" which mandates that members must vote in line with the party's directions (Madhukar 2008)

Parliament Research Service (PRS) was formed to address this challenge. Modeled on the non-partisan Congressional Research Service in the United States of America, PRS posts

simplified explanations of bills on its website and shares these reports with MPs, media houses, and the top 500 Indian corporations. The website collates comments from stakeholders which are passed on to the relevant Minister. MPs, across party lines, have welcomed the information generated by PRS and credited it with helping them perform their legislative roles better (Srivastava 2007). PRS also posts data online about MPs' actual attendance and participation in parliamentary deliberations. Such information has been highlighted by the mass media leading to increased pressure on MPs to participate and perform.


**IV. The Anna Hazare Movement**

India's economic liberalization in 1991 ushered in a period of rapid private-sector-driven economic growth that also promised to end corruption in government (because deregulation would lessen rent-seeking possibilities). However, two decades later, India has been inundated by corruption scandals. The government has found it difficult to act against coalition partners, so courts have stepped in and jailed many rich and powerful players. A former cabinet minister, a member of parliament (herself the daughter of a powerful chief minister at the time), and chief executives of telecommunication companies (including a billionaire) have been arrested for their role in the misallocation of telecommunications spectrum which has potentially cost the exchequer billions in foregone revenue. The government's choice of Chief Vigilance Commissioner—whose job is to police the bureaucracy—was quashed by the Supreme Court as the nominee was facing corruption charges. Justices of high courts have resigned after impeachment proceedings have been launched against them for corruption. The Press Commission refused to release its own committee's report on corruption and "paid news" in

the media, which was then published on the blog site of one of the authors. Even the armed

forces were found to have diverted prime housing intended for war widows to top officers and

politicians—this scandal led to the resignation of the chief minister of Maharashtra state.

Against this backdrop of institutional decay, a group of civil society activists launched an

agitation aimed at pressurizing parliament to establish an ombudsman (or *Lok Pal*) with the

power to prosecute corruption at all levels of government. Parliament has been considering

such a bill for 40 years! These activists offered an alternative to the government proposal,

termed the Jan (People's) Lok Pal bill. Activists' ranks included veterans of the sustained civil

society campaign that ushered in the Right to Information law—drawn from Gandhian,

Independent Left and Legal Activism segments of India's elites. These activists invited a

Gandhian, Anna Hazare, to be the movement's symbolic spearhead. Hazare had earned

accolades for his efforts at transforming his rural Indian neighborhood. H is ascetic lifestyle

harked back to the simplicity and values embodied by Mahatma Gandhi. Other leading religious

figures including a yoga guru with a widespread television following and a new age spiritual

leader with large numbers of urban middle class devotees climbed on the movement's

bandwagon (Baviskar 2011).

In April 2011, Hazare embarked on an indefinite hunger strike in the heart of Delhi to

pressurize the government to establish a strong Lok Pal. This agitation was timed perfectly

between two major cricket tournaments and received extensive coverage in the mainstream

media. Its success was driven substantially by the participation of India's "India Shining"

segment of elites, who established a virtual organization called India Against Corruption.

Operating mainly through Facebook, they were able to motivate thousands of sympathizers to

attend rallies and candlelight vigils in different cities—whose impact was magnified by saturation coverage on television. Faced with an uprising of the elite in different parts of India and pressured by the hunger strike of someone with the moral authority of Hazare, the government succumbed to the agitationists' demand. It agreed to set up a joint committee comprising civil society activists and MPs to draft the ombudsman legislation—thus according unelected activists the same legitimacy as elected representatives. This joint committee did not succeed in working out a proposal that both sides found acceptable.

Thereafter, in mid-August 2011, Hazare announced the launch of another hunger strike. The government preemptively arrested him. Hazare's supporters promptly released his prerecorded statement on the video sharing site, Youtube. The arrest sparked nationwide outrage at the infringement of Hazare's fundamental rights, and media harked back to India's 1975-77 period of internal emergency when rights were suspended and opposition leaders jailed. The public's hostile reaction forced the government to quickly order Hazare's release but he refused to leave jail until some of his conditions were met. The government's tactical missteps helped trigger widespread support for the Hazare-led movement.

Rallies in support of Hazare were organized across the country by a core set of India Against Corruption volunteers and attracted people drawn from all sections of society, who showed up on different days or after work. Many colleges allowed their students to skip classes in order to participate in their first political experience (given the absence of student elections in much of India). There were allegations that the crowds also included significant numbers of activists owing allegiance to the leading opposition party (Baviskar 2011).Media provided non-stop coverage of non-violent protestors using slogans and symbols from India's independence

struggle and hailed the Hazare movement as India's second freedom struggle. After a few days

of negotiations between the government and activists, Parliament passed a "sense of the

house" resolution promising strong ombudsman legislation. Hazare then ended his fast on its

twelfth day. Triumphant activists vowed to extend their campaign to other domains and

promised to focus next on electoral reforms and to institute a "right to recall" elected

representatives.

Throughout, the movement was sustained and galvanized by clever management of the

mainstream media enabled by the presence of television veterans among the activists and its

leaders' readiness to participate in television discussions (Gandhi & Pandita 2011).

Simultaneously, activists used ICTs in a thorough and multifaceted manner reaching out to

75,000 followers on Twitter, to 15 million people who had signed up to receive messages on

their mobile phones, and  to nearly half a million fans of the India Against Corruption Facebook

site (Kattakayam 2011). Going beyond the Internet, the activists set up an interactive phone

line to which calls could be made by those wanting to register support to the movement. Callers

were instructed to hang up immediately after connecting. Each such "missed call" was regarded

as a vote and the campaign claimed to have received over 13 million such calls (Gandhi &

Pandita 2011). Sitapaty (2011,  p. 43-44) sums up the reasons for the potency of the Anna

Hazare movement:

> It was able to employ Gandhian motifs to popularise an urban middle class worry that
>
> has had, until now, less currency in the rest of India. The strong legal tinge to the
>
> movement – and the legal credentials of the activists in the movement – ensures that it

is able to suggest tangible legislative changes in terms of clauses and sections. The energy and acumen of India Shining gave the movement its media-savviness and heft. … Yet, the middle class strands supporting the movement give us pause. None of them have any problem with the unrepresentative nature of the movement or the draconian powers given to the Lokpal. No matter how earnest, India's middle class has yet to view the political class as legitimate, the party system as the main way to achieve programmatic changes. Until that happens, middle class activism will be consciously set up in opposition to electoral politics, rather than as a potent force within it.

**V. India, ICTs, and Social Movement Theory**

The pattern that emerges from the above examples is that India's elites have certainly utilized ICTs as they have reengaged with political processes in diverse, often 'apolitical' ways. Further the Anna Hazare movement has shown that a section of India's elites have learned to harness ICTs and mainstream media in a spectacularly effective manner. ICTs have thus helped elites to create 'their own political and ideological constellations, circumventing established political structures, thus creating a flexible, adaptable political field' (Castells 1998, p. 350). It would be instructive to examine these examples from the perspective of social movement theory and the role of ICTs in enabling social movements.

According to McAdam *et al.* (1996) three factors affect the emergence and sustenance of social movements: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing processes. ICTs assist with mobilizing structures as they lower the costs of collective action, promote collective identity and help create communities (Garrett 2006). In the Indian context, elites' access to ICTs

has enabled them to share information and mobilize politically virtually from their desktops. They have created virtual communities of people who share a common grievance, e.g., Youth for Equality, Bengaluru Unites, and India Against Corruption. Since ICTs enable easy information dissemination and discussion, they fit well with the tactical repertoire of elites which privileges reasoned argument. Further, by visibly showing the number of people rallying around a cause online, ICTs may have enabled individuals to gather the courage to step out and protest offline. This last aspect is crucial because, in a sense, "all politics is local.[ii]"

While ICTs enable rapid political mobilization, it is not easy to sustain ICT-driven social movements, as Youth for Equality activists discovered. Visits to their website (which requires users to be proactive) dropped precipitously once its political cause was stuck in the Supreme Court (Gowda 2007). However, social networking sites now enable users to receive relevant information once they log on to sites like Facebook, without having to proactively visit each website of interest, and email listservs can also keep a community informed. The challenge for activists, then, is to share updates in a manner that sustains interest. Indeed, even dormant groups can be quickly revived when the need arises. Activists also need to be able to cope with other technology-related challenges include the security of their sites and the pathologies of online discourse such as "flame wars" (Dahlberg 2001). Looking ahead, inexpensive mobile telephony may make it easier for people to communicate and engage with social networking sites, e.g., by using Twitter to post updates on Facebook, suggesting that ICTs will continue to lower the costs of political engagement.

Opportunity structures focus on whether the political system allows or represses social mobilization and whether activists have allies within the political system (McAdam 1996). India

is hospitable to political mobilization and does not restrict ICTs. Elites can thus use ICTs and launch political initiatives freely. In terms of allies in the political system, elites dominate the mainstream English language media (Varadarajan 2006) so they can tap into media support when they challenge the political establishment (which ironically also has a strong presence of elites). Historically, broadcast media was government-controlled but liberalization has ushered in competition across all media platforms along with tremendous growth in profits. ICTs also enable social movements to grow rapidly in terms of geographic reach. This has enabled elites to mobilize across India (and internationally) easily, as seen during the Anna Hazare and Youth for Equality movements.

Another opportunity structure that favors elites who use ICTs for political mobilization arises from India's digital divides (Keniston 2004). Elites have access to ICTs, and the technical and English-language proficiency to use and profit from them, while non-elites suffer on all these counts. Those on the wrong side of digital divides face economic, social or cultural deprivation because ICT access can affect employability, availability of resources for cultural expression, and the strength of social relationships, ranging from political participation to connecting local communities (Singh, 2010). The ability to use ICTs effectively thus reinforces the elites' privileged position in Indian society and gives them a differentiating advantage when it comes to political mobilization. In the United States of America, the digital divide enables elites to enhance their already dominant role in politics, at the expense of non-elites who suffer further marginalization (Norris 2001). The contrast with India is that India's elites are trying to use ICTs to influence politics from outside the system, because they have disengaged from it over time.

Framing involves attempts by social movements to control the way a story unfolds (Garrett 2006). On this front, India's elites have been able to sustain a frame that treats their social movements as morally superior when compared to traditional forms of political engagement which are regarded as tainted by corruption. This framing is reinforced by and reflected in media coverage. One critic noted that television coverage of the Anna Hazare movement in April 2011 contained 5592 pro-Hazare segments against 62 critical of Hazare (Sharma 2011). A television anchor pointed out that critics are raising questions about whether India's media are "manufacturing dissent" (Dutt 2011). Kumar (2011) sums up media performance thus:

> The relationship between such media and their essentially middle class consumers is becoming uncomfortably incestuous. … [Interviewees] are not so much required to offer their independent view on an issue as add to the chorus of opinion orchestrated by the channel. A photo op masquerades as a movement. Dissident voices get short shrift. … [The channel's] role seems to be to trigger and promote a form of direct democracy by the middle class. Politics and politicians are routinely debunked; even representative democracy doesn't seem to make the grade.

> Given the emergence of ICT-driven political movements across the world, it is instructive to compare India's ICT- and media-driven elite mobilization with them. Of these social movements only the mobile telephony-driven display of people power that brought down President Estrada in the Philippines (Shirky 2011) would be a reasonable parallel because it also involved an anti-corruption agitation in a democratic setting. In terms of other comparisons, as Kela (2011) argues:

Hazare's movement is not remotely comparable to the Arab spring in Tunisia and Egypt, either in the courage of its participants or its wider implications. There is a considerable gulf between staring down a military dictatorship in a police state, where the ruling elite has grown accustomed to pocketing millions, and a campaign against corruption in a democracy whose freedoms exist for the middle-class (though very imperfectly for the poor), and where it is economically ascendant.

**VI. Implications of ICT-enabled Elite Political Mobilization for Indian Politics**

An intriguing pattern that emerges from ICT-enabled elite political mobilization in India is its overtly "anti-political" nature. India's elites lay emphasis on "neutral" reforms and non-partisan interventions. They seem wary of being tainted through association with established, mainstream political parties that are popularly considered to have compromised with corruption. (An alternative interpretation would be that elites prefer non-partisan political engagement so that they can achieve their goals regardless of which political party is in office).

Elites also seem to value information access, a feature common to many of their ICT-enabled initiatives (e.g., ADR, PRS, Liberty Institute, etc.). But elite efforts are limited to providing information in a non-partisan manner while letting people make their own judgments and choices. Elites do not go beyond information provision to lead campaigns that bring about transformative change by pressurizing political parties to nominate better candidates. (In the case of ADR, however, its emphasis on information provision arose because it considered that to be the only achievable policy goal in the politico-judicial context wherein the reform campaign was conducted (Sastry 2004)). Elites' emphasis on ICTs and information provision

may derive from their unquestioning faith in the ability of ICTs to enhance transparency in e-governance (Mazzarrella 2010) which they are now transferring to the political domain.

A historic perspective may provide insight into Indian elites' preference for neutral reforms and technical fixes. A century ago, the United States of America saw the emergence of a Progressive Movement with similar characteristics. It too arose after a period of rapid economic growth and the emergence of an increasingly prosperous and assertive middle class that had grown weary of widespread corruption in government and business. The American progressives also sought to bring in "rational" reforms involving structural changes, e.g., antitrust laws to break the hold of monopolies. Rather than being a coherent movement, it involved activism across many domains over decades. Their preferred technology was books and articles written by "muckrakers" which exposed corrupt practices (Buenker, et al. 1977, Joshi 2011). While progressives within mainstream parties (e.g., Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson) went on to get elected and bring about policy change, a newly-formed Progressive Party faded away.

Thus the problem with elites' emphasis on political neutrality is that it can be self-defeating in terms of achieving the political power which brings with it the ability to transform governance. This was illustrated by the case of the Citizens' Initiative drive to register graduate voters. Since it was promoted as a non-partisan voter-enrollment drive, without identifying a viable (possibly partisan) candidate, most potential elite voters ignored the effort (Gowda 2007).

That is a lesson for entrepreneurs attempting to form new political parties building on elites' support. Lok Paritran tried to emerge as a party with a middle-class-oriented agenda and

utilized ICTs to organize nationwide. But the substantial attention it gained online and in the English language media did not translate into electoral success, and it subsequently splintered into irrelevance.

Lok Satta is another party that has emerged to capitalize on elites' distaste for mainstream political parties. Founded by a doctor-turned-bureaucrat, Jayaprakash Narayan as a neutral, reform-oriented NGO, it has built a support base through extensive grassroots activity. It actively uses ICTs to promote electoral reforms and participates in National Election Watch. It converted itself into a political party just before the 2009 election. Its lone success was Narayan who was elected to the Andhra Pradesh state legislature from a constituency containing a large number of ICT professionals. Narayan's class background, reformist and non-mainstream-party agenda, and ICT-enabled methods all found favor among this electorate and his campaign also benefitted from offline mobilization (Hindu 2009). Lok Satta continues to use the rhetoric of neutral, reformist NGOs as it attempts to grow politically.

The Anna Hazare movement, with its strong anti-political rhetoric, may also achieve little in the long term if it only manages to establish a powerful ombudsman but does not usher in new, cleaner political actors and politics. Varshney (2011) points out that in modern India, only those social movements that turned into political parties have endured and influenced political outcomes decisively. But he argues that the Anna Hazare movement may break free from this pattern because its quest for democratic deepening through strengthening the accountability of elected representatives is backed by resource-rich elites who have the power of media and social media with them in their quest to eradicate corruption. Sardesai (2011) counters that the drive against corruption has been able to unite disparate elites but that the

moment the movement attempts to take up other causes, the diverging ideologies and approaches of these elites will fatally fracture its fragile unity. Thus only time will reveal whether these elites will remain a pressure group or turn to or into a political party.

Overall, ICTs appear to be the key technological weapons that enable elites to mobilize politically in India. Youth for Equality, Bengaluru Unites, and the Pink Chaddi campaign all harnessed ICTs as their media of choice for mobilization. Upadhya (2007) argues that the Internet and ICTs are natural choice of interface for India's elites, whose homogenous identity itself is largely constituted through the expansion of the information technology sector. Our explorations of ICT use by elites lead us to posit that ICTs will be central to future and rapid elite political mobilization efforts However, the sustained success of elite political movements will depend on patient, dedicated hard work on the ground, with full-time activists nurturing constituencies and striving to overcome Indian elites' traditional free-riding in the domain of political participation. Mainstream political parties will also increase the use of ICTs in their campaign repertoire, something they have not hitherto emphasized (Pinglay 2009, Sapre 2009). Over time elites' disproportionate advantage in terms of ICT access and use will diminish as newer ICTs, e.g., mobile telephony, become affordable across class barriers. In such technologies may lie the potential to usher in new forms of inclusive citizen engagement.

**Word Count: Text—7252; Overall—8633.**

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[i] India Shining was an advertising campaign commissioned and aired by the BJP-led NDA government just prior to the 2004 general election. This campaign was dominated by upbeat imagery of diverse Indians enjoying economic prosperity and emphasized the theme that India had emerged as a respected power on the global stage—thus Sitapaty (2011) uses this phrase to describe a segment of India's elites and succeeds in capturing their attitudes at the same time. The India Shining campaign succeeded in its agenda of promoting a "feel-good" factor among the public. However, the NDA's subsequent electoral defeat led many commentators to question the campaign's effectiveness. I argue that the NDA's defeat is more appropriately attributed to losses suffered by the BJP's coalition partners rather than a failure of the India Shining campaign.

[ii] A quotation attributed to Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives.