



Celebrating 50 Years of Research and Academic Endeavour

Economic Performance, Limitations of the State, and Political Regression in India

Synopsis

We explore the nature of political developments in India over the last couple of decades, and find the roots for the same in the rather insipid performance of the economy, after a bout of very high growth. The very poor performance of the state-system on both sovereign services (other than the defence) – law and justice, policing, regulation; and social services education, public health and urban services - has created a disenchantment among sections of the elite who now seek a break from the past even if it means an interregnum from democracy. At the same time, many of the poor who have escaped poverty due to the modicum of development, especially since the economic reforms of 1991-92, now constitute the vast lower middle class in India. They reveal a heightened emotional need to have an identity and to belong. The entrapment of many of them into a “nationalism” that is constructed on exclusionary and “religious” idioms has eclipsed possibilities in politics in India. The prospect of a retreat from an inclusive democracy is real. However, the reform of the judiciary, the police, and the administration, the electoral process on specific dimensions, would need to be leveraged to vastly enhance state capacity and, hence, economic and political development. The agenda for such specific reforms, therefore, becomes clamant, if regression has to be countered.