

On the Enchantment of the State

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On The Enchantment of the State: Indian thought on the role of the state in the narrative of modernity

1

One of the most fundamental ideational changes brought in by modernity in India was the transformation of the idea of the state. From an institution that was seen as a necessarily limited and distinctly unpleasant part of the basic furniture of any society, the idea of the state has produced an immense enchantment in its intellectual life to be regarded as a central moral force of the modern transformation. Indeed, in the Indian context, as distinct from the European, it has been the primary source of modernity. This paper seeks to present an absurdly short history of the curious adventures of this idea. It also seeks to explain why, despite the global dominance of ideas of liberalisation, in India this enchantment is still undiminished.

[In understanding the very different trajectories of the imaginary of the state in India and Europe, it is useful to look contextually at these ideas. I think the Skinnerian injunction about a strict contextualist reading of ideas holds not merely when we are studying theoretical work of individual theorists and meanings of their atomic statement, but also when we are trying to pursue a much more elusive beast – what a ragged and complex collectivity like political Indians (with all the necessary ambiguity of this phrase) ‘think’ about an entity called the state. The boundaries and contents of the idea of the state is likely to vary between intellectuals and common people, and also between literates and illiterates, underprivileged populations of various kinds. Yet this can be gathered together into something like a ‘political imaginary’ or a state imaginary.]

This paper is in four parts. It will first introduce an elementary distinction, necessary for my argument, between the pre-modern and modern conceptions of the ‘state’. It will present two separate examples of the pre-modern conception: an image of the state from Hindu antiquity and an Islamic-Aristotelian one associated with the Mughal rule – and suggest fundamental similarities between them. It will then describe how the peculiarity of British rule – particularly its long and staggered inception – introduced the modern idea of the state, and how Indians responded to it and conceived it as central to the social organisation of modernity. It will then show how two broad strands of thinking about the nature of modern power struggled for dominance. One produced a serious critique of the European version of the modern state and warned against its installation in India because that would impede the realisation of a good life. The other, which eventually won, advocated a comprehensive reliance on the state for the remaking of society on just and democratic principles and viewed that as the good life modernity had rendered possible. For reasons of space, I shall disregard finer differences and inflections of emphasis: but I shall focus on four major thinkers who presented fundamental ideas that have gone into the making of the Indian intellectual discourse on the fascinating fate of the modern state. This story should also illustrate a separate and more general argument in which I am interested – the need for bending middle-level principles of social/political theory away from its familiar Western architecture: bending the whole enterprise of theory – with its major methodological principles, theoretical hypotheses, large taxonomies, central concepts and the minute patterns of detailed argumentation – away towards other formations (not cultures) in a fundamental divarication of political theory.

2

Subsidiarity/Sovereignty

Two conceptions of the state

The first necessary point is to stress that although we standardly speak about the pre-modern and the modern state, this way of speaking has a major conceptual drawback: it implicitly contains an unavoidable suggestion that we are talking about two historically different versions of the same object; though this precisely is to be turned into a problem. In fact we are talking about two very different organisations, although for other theoretical reasons it is plausible to house them inside a capacious general category. If the state designates any coherent, distinct organisation of power such that it identifies a group of people and an institutional structure which lays down the rules which members of a society must follow, it can perform the conceptual function of that generic category. It would be clear however that this definition is much wider than the definition we draw conventionally from Max Weber – because it omits two crucial Weberian features – it makes no reference to anonymity or

impersonality of the powers of the state; nor does it demand that the state has the monopoly of legitimate uses of violence. The Weberian idea is in any case undeniably local in historical terms, as the feudal order in Europe could not fit his more stringent definition.

States of Subsidiarity/subsumption

The Idea of the Pre-modern State: The *Manusmṛti*¹

Ancient Hindu philosophy produced two styles of reflection on the nature of royal power. Some theoretical treatises contained detailed dogmatic compendia of the rules of royal rule.² Reflective discussions on the nature of royal power were generated by a perpetual interweaving of two kinds of thinking – one strand contained in the texts setting out high principles like the *Manusmṛti* and *Arthashastra*, and the other suggested by the narrative complications offered to those principles by the epic and puranic narratives.³ The *Manusmṛti* provides a detailed dogmatics about the power of the ruler in its seventh and the eighth chapters. Although Manu conceives of only a single royal form of state power, and does not refer to the republican traditions of Hindu and Buddhist antiquity, his disputation about the character of state power is subtle on several points. In sloka 3 of chapter VII Manu begins with a demonstration of the necessity of the state which resembles an elementary Hobbesian picture: “Since in a condition of anarchy, ordinary human beings are terrified by the powerful, for the preservation/security of all people Creator has created kingship.” (Manu Ch 7, sloka 3.) Since he represents social order, even though the king is a child, he should be treated like a god, ie, as an agent different from ordinary human beings. (Manu, ch 7. s.8). The central move of the theory of kingship is made, in my view, in s.14:

In the interest of the king/ for the good of the king, God first created *danda*(an abstract conception of ‘order’) in his own image, for the preservation of all beings.

This ‘law’ which combines the attributes of both a divine and a natural conception, is central to Manu’s conception of kingship. By distinguishing between ‘the law’ and a fallible human agent, the king, Manu is able to create a theoretical structure in which the king does not enjoy absolute power. The king’s power is simply the translation into the human scale of the law, the logic of a divinely given natural and social order. The *Manusmṛti* makes it entirely clear that the locus of sovereignty is in the *danda*, not in the person of the king:

“In essence, it is the law that is the king, the person with authority, the person who keeps the order of the realm, and provides leadership to it.” (sloka 17) Entirely consistent with this theory is the corollary that if a king goes against the rules of this abstract and super-personal order, he is “destroyed by the order itself” (*dandenaiva nihanyate*). (Sloka 27) This *danda* is truly “the source of immense power” (*sumahattejo*) and is impossible to control and use by those “rulers who have not learnt to govern their

¹ One of the most celebrated texts of social rules in the Hindu tradition is the compendium, *Manusmṛti*, attributed to a legendary sage, Manu. It provides the most detailed description of rules to be observed in Hindu social life, with two chapters 7 and 8 dealing with *rajadharma* – the rules to be observed by the king. Three of the most famous of these were the two chapters dealing with royal power in the *Manusmṛti*, the great dogmatic digest of rules of Hindu social life which detailed the rules that should govern the conduct of both ordinary members of a principality and of the ruler, the *Arthashastra*, the treatise composed according to legend by Chanakya the shrewd counsellor to the first Maurya emperor Chandragupta who defeated Alexander’s successor Seleucus and established a Hindu empire later inherited and morally transformed by Asoka his grandson who converted to Buddhism, and finally, the almost entirely self-standing disquisition on royal power given by the great elder statesman Bhishma on his bed of arrows, before his death, to the new king after the great battle in the late canto of the *Mahabharata*.

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³ In the Hindu tradition, scholars were exhorted to read the theoretical texts along with the epic narratives, because they contained exercises in application of the principles.

own selves” (*durdharasakrtatmabhih*). (for the relevant passages, see Laws of Manu, Doniger and Smith, 129-131) The fundamental distinction between the king as the human agent and the Law as the superhuman abstract order leads to a theory of restrained rulership and a conception of fairness of treatment towards different types of subjects. Early Hindu reflections on the state sought to produce a theory which, while recognising the requirement of unrestricted royal authority, sought to impose restrictions upon it by positing an order that was morally transcendent to which it was both subject and eventually responsible.

Two aspects of the Hindu theory are significant for a long-term historical understanding of conceptions of the state. The first is simply an implication from the last observation. A central feature of Hindu society is the curious complex relationship between the upper castes of the archaic *varna* order. The order of the ancient *varnas* is based, as is well known on a division between the great goods of human life: pure prestige associated with knowledge, political power vested in royal authority, and wealth produced by commercial activity; interestingly the social order of the *varnas* separates these radically by making them the legitimate province of the life-activity of specific and separate castes. By radically separating them, the *varna* structure also brings into play a subtle but persistent logic of coalitional interdependence between these groups, making them interdependent on each others’ assets. Dominance of a complex caste-based social order can be achieved not by the exclusive use of any of these assets – of prestige, power and wealth, but by their combination: it is only a combination of these assets and their social possessors which could be sufficient for social dominance. Yet, curiously, even these upper castes live according to general rules of hierarchy, and the Brahmins retained their ritual superiority over the two other upper castes – the ksatriyas and vaisyas, primarily because they are regarded the human representatives of this transcendental order. In a certain sense, of course, a well ordered society is ruled by abstract principles, but these principles need constant reinterpretation in face of historical change and complexity of circumstance; the Brahmins are the repositories of this essential form of social knowledge. This explains some peculiar rhetorical characteristics of the *Manusmṛti*. Traditionally, nationalists illegitimately assimilated Indian forms of writing to European ones, often suggesting that the texts like *Manusmṛti*, *Arthashastra* and the Santiparva of the *Mahabharata* were similar to the European literature on advice to the princes. Closer attention to the technical rhetorics of address, the manner of writing, even the use of the grammatical forms of the imperative reveals a significant difference. The *Manusmṛti* is written in an imperative mood, a mood of command, not friendly avuncular advice from a wise, intelligent, widely experienced counsellor. There is correspondingly very little use of concrete historical examples: because these are not items of advice, but rules created by a transcendent authority accessible, because of their cognitive specialisation, only to the thin stratum of Brahminical intelligentsia – to be followed, without hesitation or defiance, by wielders of political authority. The *Smṛti* is written in the grand, unanswerable tone of a divine decree simply recorded by its human amanuensis. The central idea of this form of political theory is that social order is not subordinate to the king’s legislative function: rather, he is subordinate to the social order.

Another central idea in the *Manusmṛti*, entirely consistent with this line of reasoning, is the relation between the political ruler and the caste order of social practice. The ruler’s power is executive or administrative, it cannot make fundamental rules of social conduct or change them. The rules of the caste order are therefore impervious to the constant fluctuations of royal power. The constant ebb and flow of power from dynasties or kingdoms constitute a stratum of events which happen at the insignificant surface of deep social life – affecting the lives of a very small number of individuals who are born, by their caste fate, to endure the impermanence and aggravations of a life of political power. Narrative traditions of the Hindu epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata - merely accentuate this sense of the excessive and exorbitant mortality of political power, of the extraordinarily volatile existence of rulership, and emphasise the extraordinary gifts required of individuals who have the miraculous moral skills for making such lives fulfilling. The two primary features of the Hindu theory of the state therefore restrained the state by subjecting it to a transcendent divine order, and divesting the state of all legislative authority over society. This seems to me to explain an unusual feature of Indian history – the general absence of political rebellions against political rulers similar to the slave or peasant rebellions of ancient or medieval Europe. By contrast, the major upheavals of Indian society were directed against this supposedly transcendent order and its primary intellectual custodians and mediators - the brahminical intelligentsia. Indian society saw a succession of social reform movements against the classical brahminical social order – starting with Buddhism and Jainism in ancient times down to *bhakti* movements for social reform which responded to the political and religious challenge of Islam.

The Islamic State in India

Islam and Hinduism contained antithetical principles in many respects, for example, about idolatry and the nature of God, but in terms of the relation between the power of political rulers and what I have called the 'social constitution', they obeyed surprisingly similar rules. Islam was a religion of the book, unlike Hinduism, and its social constitution, it could be argued, was far more explicitly laid down in the Koran and hadith in contrast to the messy diversity of sectarian texts within the Hinduism. Yet, to the significant question of whether the temporary possessor of political power could alter the fundamental tenets of the social constitution, Islam suggested a remarkably similar answer. It can be a plausible functionalist suggestion that in traditional agrarian societies political power was so fragile and volatile that necessary social stability could not be maintained if legislative power of a serious kind was given to the political ruler. To impart stability to norms of social life and save them from arbitrary rule, most religions in agrarian societies probably followed a similar logic of ascribing the power of legislative constitution of society to divine authority, with a crucial mediating role played by religious intellectuals – the very similar function performed by Brahmins in Hinduism and the *ulema* in Islam. After the eleventh century most of northern India was politically subordinated to Islamic dynasties; yet, strangely, this stable Islamic empire made little effort at systematic conversion of the Hindu society. Recent historical scholarship has added some intellectual clarification for this extraordinary behaviour of Islamic empires in South Asia. (Alam, 2004) The Mughals, the most powerful of the Islamic dynasties in South Asia, followed a theory of rule drawn from a tradition of Persianate Islam which developed under entirely exceptional circumstances in Khorasan. Unlike the rest of the Islamic world, in Khorasan, a highly developed Islamic society had to submit to the conquest of non-Islamic rulers. Using a reading of Aristotle, Islamic intellectuals claimed that the responsibility of the ruler, irrespective of his own personal faith, was to provide conditions for human flourishing for his subjects. The task of the ruler was not just to ensure that his subjects were able 'to live', but 'to live in a way fit for human beings'. Living as human beings – not just *zoe* but *bios* – required conditions in which subjects could use their intellectual and spiritual capacities. By this interesting derivation from Aristotle they were able to assert that the task of the non-Islamic ruler was to preserve the religious practice of his Islamic subjects. By a generous application of this principle, the Mughal dynasty extended a *rule* of tolerance to the surrounding Hindu society of their subjects. From our angle, what is significant is that Islamic political rulers implicitly accepted limitations on political authority in relation to the social constitution that were parallel to those of Hindu rulers. In terms of the historical long-term, entry of Islam into Indian society began highly significant changes in many other fields of social life, but not in the structure of its political order. The Islamic state saw itself as limited and socially distant as the Hindu state. Crucially, because of this reason, neither the Hindu nor the Islamic state employed a conception of what domination entailed that was strictly similar to modern European notions of sovereignty. In terms of their *external* relations with other kingdoms or empires, these states were certainly sovereign over their territories; but we cannot simply assume that in their *internal* relation with their subjects, these states exercised the familiar rights of sovereignty. It is essential to understand the difference between actual weakness of a state and its marginality in principle. The relative autonomy of the social constitution from the state was not because the state was weak, and would have invaded social rules if it could muster the necessary strength. Rather it accepted a marginality that was a consequence of its own normative principles. The marginality of the pre-modern state was a social fact precisely because it followed from a moral principle which guided the relation between rulers and subjects..

3

States of sovereignty

Colonialism and the early modern state

The history of India from the sixteenth century has become a field of astonishingly fertile contestation in recent years – with striking revisionist suggestions about both historical and conceptual questions. Historians working on vernacular textual sources have suggested an autochthonous process of early modernity which was partly accelerated, partly negated by the arrival of colonialism which introduced institutional forms from modern Europe. (Pollock 2003, 2004; Rao, Subrahmanyam and Shulman 2002). According to a new strand of historiography, there was a demonstrable impulse of indigenous modernity from the sixteenth century onwards that was defeated and channelled in different directions by the triumph of British power in the mid-eighteenth century. British colonial power entered India in a peculiar fashion which has become difficult to recover with historical accuracy, because the immensely powerful narratives of British imperialism and Indian nationalism both tend to occlude its complex and

unusual character. Both imperial histories and nationalist narratives saw this as a cataclysmic struggle between two societies – their normative principles and their collective institutions, though the actual historical process was far more limited, uneven and messy. British power did not enter into Indian society as a conquering colonial power: in fact secrecy, stealth and imperceptibility were the conditions of its conquest. The British could eventually conquer India, precisely because they did not conquer it all at once, and the entire process did not look at least initially like a conventional imperial conquest. Similarly, nationalist torment about the loss of sovereignty to a distant and alien power was also based on a mis-description. The British did not conquer India which existed before their conquest; rather, they conquered a series of independent kingdoms which became political India during and in part as a response to their dominion. (Kaviraj 1995) Schematically, all states before the coming of colonial modernity in India answered the description of a *state of subsumption/subsidiarity*: they dominated the society as a group of rulers distinct from the society below them, untied to their subjects by any strong common emotive or institutional bond; correspondingly, their ability to affect the society's basic structure of the organisation of everyday life was seriously restricted.

The idea of the modern state in the west was first of all an object of long tradition of theoretical reflection, whereas in India, there was a disconnection between the earlier theory and the nature of the modern state. In Europe, the rise of the modern state happened against an intellectual context of major theoretical interventions (by Hobbes and Locke, for instance) which emphasised simultaneously the necessity of the modern state and a simultaneous suspicion of its overexpansion into areas of 'civil society'. Western political theorists drew upon a long tradition from Greek and Roman antiquity of reflecting philosophically on questions of the state, of the nature of political obligation, the idea of the *res publica*, and the more recent traditions of Italian republican political thought. By contrast, when the modern state arrived in India, despite considerable sophistication of its intellectual life, Indian society could not draw upon an existing body of conceptual and theoretical resources to make sense of, describe and evaluate the new institutional and practical forms of political power.

From the point of view of comparative history, the rise of the institutions of the modern European states was marked also by the emergence of strands of thought and behaviour deeply mistrustful of this monstrously powerful new institution of the absolutist state which, for the first time, entirely subdued all other centres of competing authority. As one particular line of political theory associated with Bodin and Hobbes pressed for a prudential and moral recognition of its authority, there were parallel intellectual lines of reasoning which suggested that restraints should be placed on its potentially destructive powers (Locke and Montesquieu in vastly different, but equally influential ways). Additionally, in the emerging capitalist social form, powerful social classes like the emerging bourgeoisie deeply mistrusted the absolutist state and its potentially predatory intent. Guizot's elegant thesis that European modernity was made possible because in its long history none of the three principles – royal, aristocratic and popular – was ever completely destroyed, and each balanced the other – in a sense reflected this historical reality. Crucially, Indian society had never seen a state form which remotely resembled the unprecedented powers of the modern state: its intellectual culture therefore, did not feel an urgent need to either define and understand the powers of the modern state, or to produce a strong argument which urged that people treat this new institution with caution.

In fact, the study of the peculiar process by which the colonial state emerged illustrates an important theoretical fact: the various functions which are systematically bundled together in the modern were not institutionally conjoined in earlier times in a necessarily singular structure. British power entered into Indian society almost unnoticed, when the East India Company became one of the major players in a situation of political uncertainty and flux. As the Company established its hold over specific levels of the economy and administration of various regions of India, it introduced, in segments and as its requirements demanded, various military and administrative *functions* to its indescribable collection of diverse activities. Its power was based, initially, on the one side, on a legal permission to trade given by the Mughal authority which was already normatively fading and politically ineffective, and on the other, by its military capacity to protect its territorial and commercial establishments. As its territory expanded, and as it got a further permission to collect revenue on behalf of the empire, it had to bring in accounting practices, which led, in its turn, to greater cultural contact with the native population and cautious cultural moves to introduce the natives to modern education. Eventually, in a period of about seventy years, these new ruling practices came together to form what became the recognizable figure of a colonial state.

As it established itself on Indian soil, the colonial authority continued to display the outward insignia of a state of subsumption.. First, initially, the functions it partly inherited and partly usurped were indeed those of a subsumption state. Secondly, in its early stages, the Company was anxious not to produce an exaggerated image of its control – for fear of triggering a rebellion. Third, those who ran the Company administration and those who exercised increasingly substantial supervision over its expanding operations, on behalf of the British government followed what they considered Roman precedents, before the British Empire found its own true principles and a suitable rhetoric accompanying them. Finally, there was a strong current of opinion, represented by Burke, that was deeply mistrustful of its actions in India and feared that its lawlessness in the colony will slowly invade the rules of metropolitan governance.

Eventually, when British power was consolidated, the form of the state that emerged was an intermediate form, a hybrid between an empire-state of the older type and a sovereign state. Some of its features came to demonstrate distinct marks of the relation of sovereignty that binds subjects to their sovereign state authority; however, its colonial character prevented it from developing other aspects of a state of sovereignty or its evolution into what Foucault has called 'governmentality'. The relation of sovereignty characteristically marked the relation between the state and its nation. As modern research in nationalism has demonstrated, it was the state that established fixed territories, introduced new cultural practices and 'produced' their nations, contrary to the earlier view that it was pre-existent nations which demanded and eventually got their states. The Italian and German cases where something like the conventional narrative was credible, were in fact the exceptions, not the rule.

It was soon evident that the British empire was fundamentally different from its Mughal predecessor in some fundamental ways. The nature of its power, the purposes for which it was used, its long term historical consequences were all immeasurably different from earlier empire-states. British colonial rule, because of its unprecedented military supremacy, gave a new kind of fixity to political territoriality. Except for the outlying regions in the North West, most of the subcontinent came under a stable, single administrative authority. Territorial fixity was followed by a slowly expanding moral claim of sovereign power. Though in European discourse, British rule over India was often justified by a dubious 'right of conquest' , within India, it was ideologically anchored more effectively in a typically utilitarian line of reasoning. It maintained that the legitimacy of a government should be judged *consequentially* – not by some vague and indeterminable right of natives to rule, but by the historical results of a form of governance.

Early colonial policy proceeded from an acknowledgement of the alienness of British power and showed excessive anxiety over interference in social habits of the subjects. British missionaries often pursued energetic campaigns for conversion from Hindu society, and chided the government for not performing its Christian duty of spreading rationalism and enlightened beliefs by interventionist legislation. By the middle of the nineteenth century, such claims of sovereignty were beginning to be embedded in early modern Indian culture, and the rebellion of 1857-58 can be seen as a desperate attempt at rejection of this new definition of an alien but sovereign state with the help of more conventional languages of power. The rebellion failed ideologically as well as politically. Except for a small revivalist Muslim elite in Northern India who believed in the possibility of a return to Mughal power, it had ambivalent support from ordinary people. The majority of the peasantry were too alienated from the world of political power to even respond to the contestation of legitimacy. The modernist elites based in Calcutta saw their own prospect as being too deeply entangled with British rule to welcome such ruinous retreat into the past.

After the rebellion of mid-nineteenth century, and in part as its consequence, the character of colonial rule changed in major ways. First, the metropolitan government assumed direct responsibility of the Indian empire, abandoning the earlier policy of ambivalent exploitation of the colonial connection. When the Company ruled India, British official policy was a mixture of quiet enjoyment of the financial benefits of Company rule and a casual denial of responsibility if things went wrong. From the direct assumption of empire by the home government, the British establishment had to be more directly involved in the affairs of the colony, and it had to take far more seriously progressive demands that emerging liberal rules of governance should be applied to the government of India. Secondly, colonial authorities had a clearer perception of the political need for Indian collaboration, bringing a group of modernist Indians into the business of colonial administration in subordinate roles, so that they could work as an ideological relay into Indian society, performing a quasi-hegemonic connection with at least the ambitious, modernist segment of the Indian upper class. It is fair to say that in the early period of

direct crown rule, the Indian upper classes saw the expanding claims of sovereignty of the British state as an implement of intensifying their own control over Indian society. The case of the abolition of Sati – the ritual burning of widows - is an excellent example. Social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy despaired of persuading conservative Hindu society to support a rationalistic rejection of Sati; and gradually shifted their strategy to persuade the reluctant colonial administration to interfere in stamping out barbaric practices.

The Sati episode also showed the emergence of a diremption of attitudes that was to characterise Indian political discourse for a long time. The controversy split the Indian side into three ideological camps. The first supported the abolition unconditionally, and argued that since the Hindu society was unwilling to abolish the practice, the only rational solution to the problem was to bring in the power of the colonial state. Some Hindu reformers agreed that Sati was morally abhorrent, but must be eradicated by Hindu society itself – through a process of self-correction. To allow the colonial state to rectify admitted barbarisms of indigenous society was to give it an illegitimate jurisdiction for interference without consultation and went against the fundamental notions of self-rule. A third strand of Hindu opinion was solidly conservative, and opposed both the jurisdiction of the state to initiate reform and the rejected normative criticisms of sati as a social practice. The second strand of argument was the most interesting in a sense, and also contained an ambiguity. It was not clear at that stage if the objection to the use of the state as a reforming power against society was because it was a foreign power, or because it was the state itself. In later periods, these would increasingly diverge into two separate strands of political reflection – one rejecting the foreignness of the intervention, the other, more radical one, objecting to the power of the modern state to intervene in the rules of society. All these strands would use the idea of *swaraj/swarajya* – self rule or autonomy, but in significantly different, often contradictory directions. I shall try to illustrate this by reference to three intellectual positions in the evolving discourse about the nature and role of the modern state.

Indian reflection on the peculiarities of imperial control brought the question of the state gradually to the centre of political field of vision. In the nineteenth century, the central puzzle for Indian intellectuals trying to understand their history was the question of subjugation: how such a small number of alien rulers, from such a distant base, could control a country of such immense size and diversity. From the early twentieth century, this question was transformed into the question of independence, a consideration of how this power could be contested and ultimately removed. Answering the first question went through several stages, and Indian intellectuals eventually provided increasingly complex and ‘political’ answers to this central puzzle of history. Initially, Indians were inclined to blame the victory of the British simply on an unusually long run of misfortune in battles. But British victories were too numerous, and too consistent to be explained away as a statistical quirk. A second version of the explanation focused on military technology and organization; but Indian rulers like Tipu Sultan of Mysore eventually succumbed to British power even though they employed European military organization and technology. When these two explanations appeared implausible, Indian discussions moved towards a more sociological form of analysis, suggesting that the obvious invincibility of British power grew not out of material things like superior technology, or simple organisation of their armed forces, but something deeper, more comprehensive and subtle – which Indian intellectuals slowly identified as ‘a national spirit’ – by which they meant the historically peculiar device of the modern nation-state – which produced a new constitutive relation between the people and their state. Early Indian nationalist thinking is replete with references to the virtues of discipline and what Foucault has termed ‘governmentality’.

A Discourse of Disillusionment: Bhudev Mukhopadhyay

A major strand of theoretical reflection emerged in the 1860s in the work of several Bengali authors, among whom Bhudev Mukhopadhyay’s essays on sociology (Mukhopadhyay 1892 [1981]) were the most incisive and consistent. Bhudev wrote a powerful treatise which asserted that Indian and European societies were providentially joined by history, but the simple power of colonialism could not erase the fundamental fact that the two societies were organised around demonstrably different principles –in the normative and organisational sense. Indian society, by which he primarily meant the Hindu social order based on caste, was characterised by an *interior organisation (antahsasane sasita)*:this was interior, and anterior to the external authority of the state. Its normative principles derived from a collectively accepted and intelligible normative order of *dharmā*, and it ran according to those ‘internal’ principles, in other words, disqualifying the claims of ‘internal sovereignty’ of the modern state. Modern European societies alienated this power of social organisation to a state which then assumed legitimate external authority to provide societies and communities embedded in them

with their normative and practical order. External interference into the settled habits of Hindu society – its *sittlichkeit*, (Bhudev was extremely well acquainted with contemporary European theory and commented on Hegel in a separate part of his work[Mukhopadhyay 1891]) – was therefore perceived as normatively unjustified, and for this reason, likely to be ineffectual, if attempted by pure force. (Mukhopadhyay 1891, for interpretations, Raychaudhuri 1989, Kaviraj 1995) Bhudev was among the early thinkers who offered a comprehensive sociology of the European civilisation, and built an unappealing Hobbesian picture of modern European society. European societies were based on a new kind of fundamental acquisitiveness and expansion of individuality which had three negative effects when judged from a rationalistic humanist perspective. It destroyed the unconditional affection which held the family together, and introduced forces which would turn this basic social unit into an increasingly contractual institution. It turned the world of work, the field of interaction between persons into a field of unceasing conflict, a war of all against all. For Bhudev, Hobbes's solution was delusive: the creation of a sovereign would not reduce or eliminate unconditional conflict, it simply gave it a more civilised disguise: modern European societies did not have real moral cement because of apotheosis of competition. The civil society, or its economic version of the modern market, appeared to him to create a condition of utter instability of fortunes and made modern Europeans accept that as a natural and desirable condition produced by a false theory of 'the human nature'. European colonialism was simply the application of this logic of conflict to the level of world society. From altering the norms and institutions of their own societies, European societies now had the power to extend them to all others – to impose these norms artificially on all their dominions and pretend that this forced universality confirmed their 'natural' character. Modern societies did not emerge in other cultures through spontaneous combustion, but by the forcible reforms of European rule.

Modern states were unprecedented devices by which the entire social universe in the colonies was re-structured by European imperialism into a form of society that was excessively materialistic, individualistic and competitive and which eventually made any real conception of society unsustainable.⁴ In Bhudev's critique – which was echoed and elaborated by a long line of subsequent nationalist writers – eventually this led to comprehensive moral rejection of the Western modernist social form. Bhudev's succinct assessment was interesting: this society would eventually undermine its own bonds of basic sociality by encouraging individuals to treat all others instrumentally (to borrow Kantian language) and make life unfulfilling. States based on these forms of sociality would reproduce similar relations of hostility and competition towards other states, which would lead to interminable wars among nation-states. In an intriguing critique of emerging international law in the nineteenth century, Bhudev suggested that modern European societies periodically sought to impose such quasi-legal restraints on their own states, because the history of European modernity was an incomprehensible story of building and destruction. European societies created an opulent civilisation in periods of peace, but were unable to control state conflicts which swiftly annihilated what was achieved. But Europeans were tiring of the repeated mutual destruction of their own prosperity. If that version of international law succeeded, it would reduce military destruction within the European continent; but as the militaristic and aggressive nationalist nature of these states could not be changed, this would simply mean the transference of devastating wars from the European centre to the peripheral world of the colonies. It would be the rest of the world who would have to pay the price for European propensity towards aggression. Interestingly, although Bhudev was sharply critical of modern European statecraft, he showed deep admiration for two achievements of European modernity: political economy, the European science of improving the wealth of nations, and the growth of modern science. Besides these two spheres, Indian society had nothing to learn morally from Europe.

But Bhudev's reflections on the state remained fatally incomplete on several counts. First, his thought, though insightful and critically incisive about the centrality of the state in European modernity recorded this simply as a brute historical fact, without any sense of strategic opposition: he had no answer to its power, except for refined disapproval. Without a counter-strategy, his response to colonialism was simply a technique of what Bhabha has termed 'sly civility' (Bhabha, 1999) – accepting British rule as providentially given while waiting for some future fundamental change in the field of political power. What is notable about Bhudev's early modern critique of Western modernity is its sense that the modern West is a new kind of historical force which would not merely transform Western societies but which carried a universalist proposal for moral and institutional change in all

⁴ Bhudev was writing in a period when Bengali fascination with French theories, particularly Rousseau, was at its peak; and some of his arguments may have come from a reading of Rousseau as much as from Hindu philosophical reflection.

civilisations – that the civilisation of the modern West was ‘universalistic’ in a different way from the hopeful and putative universalism of proselytising religions like Christianity and Islam. Central to his thought was also the deep reflective conviction that the form of life that Western modernity proposed to the rest of the world was morally indefensible and causally dangerous, because although the ideology of Western modernity assumed that it had philosophical implements to secure other cultures’ dialogic conversion, it had acquired the political power necessary for a monologic imposition of transformation according to its own preferred rules. The trouble with the modern Western civilisation was that it talked about the dialogic persuasion of norms, but actually relied more on the coercion of unanswerable power – which must remind us of contemporary parallels. After close inspection, he rejected the Western proposals of modernity on four fundamental grounds: capitalist modernity depleted the emotional bonds inside the family by making them illegitimately contractual; capitalist economies destroyed all sense of community by turning human relations competitive and aggressive; modern states were primarily effective engines of comprehensive wars against other states; the search for self-interest of states drove modern European nations into denial of self-determination, which they valued for themselves, in case of others - justifying modern imperialism. The very universality of the proposals of European modernity forced reflective individuals of other societies, who wished to live thoughtfully in their history, to adopt a partly relativistic vision of an increasingly globalising world that did not allow traditional separateness of cultures. The intellectual and political power of European modernity irreversibly ended the era of isolated civilisations. Evaluative isolationism was rendered impossible in a world dominated by European colonialism. The work of social theory – conceiving the principles on which one’s society run the most general abstract form – and making comparative judgements about different societies - was an inevitable task for modern intellectuals. Bhudev was convinced that Hindu society had to be subjected to scrutiny by abstract rational principles, and confident that it could win such an argument with modern European social philosophy. But implicit in his thinking was the idea of the unavoidable centrality of social philosophy to the human condition in modernity. To defend Hindu society against Western cultural imperialism required social theory as much as the modernist argument of assimilation into a single homogeneous modern culture ruled from a Western imperial centre.

I give more space to an elaboration of Bhudev Mukhoapdhyay’s thought for several parochial reasons. First, in recent historiography of Indian intellectual history, vernacular reflection has been relatively neglected in favour of authors who wrote in English. Yet, the ideas of English writers were often derived from strands of reasoning which were already powerfully articulated in the odd secrecy of vernacular discourse. In some ways, vernacular critical thought was in fact more original and more intransigent towards Western reasoning than what appeared in English.⁵ Secondly, a discussion of Bhudev shows that Gandhi’s startling interventions on the question of modernity and the state, had a long indigenous pan-Indian history.

The Discourse of Disillusion: Gandhi

Gandhi’s intransigent rejection of modernity’s material, technical and political attractions made this critical political vision internationally known – though originally it simply attracted amused derision from Western sources. Gandhi’s elaboration of this position (Parekh 1986, Brown 1996) introduced some crucial disjunctions with Bhudev. Gandhi revoked the two concessions even an historical conservative like Bhudev had made to European modernity – on the crucial questions of science and political economy. By doing this he would add a new dimension to the critique. Gandhi asserted that the central feature of modern Western society was the substitution of the traditional of moral restraint – in desires of the individual, economic acquisitiveness of the society, in the human exploitation of nature by technology. By using the resonant Hindu-Buddhist idea of *himsa* – violence in a vastly capacious sense – which could extend from personal jealousy against others, to meat-eating and violent treatment of animals, to aggressive relations with others in market society, to modern wars which

⁵ No serious study has been done on Gandhi’s autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, a central text which was composed in Gujarati and translated into English. The English version of course utterly overshadowed the Gujarati original; but some of my Gujarati colleagues believe a close textual scrutiny would reveal serious and significant differences of emphasis and inflection between the two texts. Exactly parallel to this, Tagore wrote in far more complex ways about nationalism – both Indian and European in his copious Bengali essays on this theme than the simplified presentation in his English text, *Nationalism*. Little serious work however has been done on this crucial problem of self-translation.

extended the full capacity of modern science and technology towards a rationalist project of destruction against other states and peoples – Gandhi thought he could bring the entire architecture of European modernity into a single intelligible theoretical grid, and in a manner entirely persuasive to religious-minded Indians. He simply appealed innovatively to a concept deeply embedded in reformist traditions of Indic religion – in Buddhism, Jainism and all versions of Vaishnava sects. In Gandhi’s hands, and partly in the works of his friend, Tagore this critique of modernity assumed a different kind of dignity and coherence. For Gandhi, the major predicament of the modern European culture (he disagreed with its description as a ‘modern civilisation’)⁶ arose from its reversal of the ideal of restraint which was central ideal common to all pre-modern civilisations. For Gandhi the central principle of human life was restraint, what he would call *swaraj* - using a theme of dominant reflection in Indic religions on government of the self, especially its sensual desires. In Gandhi’s thought, there was a distinction and inverse relation between *internal* and *external* government. If the individual could govern, restrain, control his self, especially his material desires, he would find contentment, and would require less external control. The extent of intrusion of the state in the lives of individuals and of local communities was directly proportional to their failure to exercise self-restraint. If we observe closely, we will find a direct elaboration of the Bhudev argument that traditional Indian society was *ruled from inside*, ordered by the operation of internal restraint – only this has now been elaborated into a much more comprehensive and multi-level doctrine explaining the adversities common to the modern life. Because European modernity has turned human ideals upside down, and re-interpreted a fulfilling human life as not one in which desires are restrained and “stilled” (a very Hindu concept running powerfully through both the *Gita* and the teachings of the Buddha, cf. *Gita* and the *Dhammapada*), and through which he can live in solidarity and compassion with others, but has turned the abandonment of restraint itself into the human life-ideal, it is forced increasingly to depend on the powers of the state. As the individuals’ acquisitiveness is encouraged and crosses all restraints, the ordering powers of the state have to expand to impose legal prohibitions: for Gandhi therefore there was a clear explanatory solution to the paradoxical simultaneity of the expansion of liberal ideals of individual freedom and the inevitable expansion of the powers of the state. It was a failure of liberal theory not to see the deep connection between these two parallel developments in Western modernity. The more the atomistic individual is encouraged by the modern social imaginary to invade others, the more the state would be called upon to restrain and mediate between them. Finally, the enslavement of the individual to his/her own desires leads necessarily to the enslavement of societies to their states and ruling mechanisms of external institutional order. This historically conservative theory of the state therefore had two defining characteristics: it accepted as ideal the conventional belief in an order which was divinely given, but rationally intelligible to ordinary human beings, which reduced the function of the state to the merest preservation of that order. Its conception was also of a minimal state, but minimal in a distinctly different sense from the *laissez faire* liberalism. This vision questioned the need of the modern state altogether: what it sought was not a minimal version of the modern state, but the state minimised in a pre-modern way.

But Gandhi’s theory of ‘the government of the self and government of society’ failed to answer several questions. In Gandhi’s writings there was an implicit acknowledgement of an idea central to Tocqueville’s analysis of the European state. The powers of the modern state were so vast and intrusive, individual defiance to this state was ineffectual, the only form of resistance to the power of the modern state was another typically modern form of producing collective agency, the political movement. This was already a fundamental concession to political modernity. Besides, Gandhi’s thinking had no simple answer to the question of how to evict the power of the state from Indian society; once British colonialism was removed. Gandhi’s historical conservatism eventually failed because of three reasons. First, the modern state was attractive to modern elites because they saw in it an immense expedient for the expansion of their own power over society: modern elites were not satisfied with segmentary forms of domination; and only the mediation of the modern state could provide them with that. The subaltern groups in Indian society, especially the lower castes and untouchables, also saw in the modern state the only instrumentality which could provide them with some reasonable chance of emancipation from traditional subordination to social elites. Finally, it was clear to the political and intellectual elites, whatever the undesirable associations of the modern state, the international order was an order of states, and no national group could exist viably without employing this transactively mandatory form of political organisation. Historical conservatism

⁶ When asked by a journalist what he thought of the Western civilisation, Gandhi said it would be a good idea.

therefore remained a powerful critique and utopia, which bothered, troubled, inconvenienced the irresistible march of the idea of the modern state, but eventually could not resist it.

The enchantment of the state: the modernist political imaginary

No other thinkers could compare with Gandhi and Tagore in intellectual significance; yet paradoxically, the *political* imagination of independent India – both of the elite and of the subaltern groups – turned in an opposite direction. Their ideas were accorded a hollow reverence, while actual political reasoning fell deeper into an enchantment with the state. Gandhi brought independence to India, but it was Nehru who got the historical opportunity to decide what to do with that independence, and how the powers of this newly acquired sovereignty should be used. In any case, there was a contradiction at the heart of the Gandhian political project. After all, the independence movement was about the capture of the state; and it was anomalous to suggest that the state that was captured with so much of trouble, should be reduced to insignificance. Sociologically, the crucial reason for the state's triumph in the Indian political imaginary was the manner in which it captured the imagination of both the elites and the masses. Eventually, even the conservative elites who initially held back from the seduction of the state were forced to succumb to it, partly because of the strange paradox of modern political rationality – even those who wish to restrict the inroads of the state in society's affairs have to use the state to legislate that prohibition. Our comparisons are usually utterly one-sided – measuring modern India against modern Europe. If India is compared with other societies of the South, probably the most striking thing is the depth the modern idea of the state and the working of its institutions have gained in the political imaginary of modern Indian people.

The most consistent and eloquent presentation of the modern *statist* vision of the future came of course from Jawaharlal Nehru who consistently represented a different theoretical view inside the national movement, and was to become India's first prime minister. Nehru considered Gandhi's vision of the quiet, idyllic Indian village community historically romantic and unworkable. Nehru, had a vivid and thoroughly modernist political imagination which was based on the conception of an elective self, of an economically atomistic individual who would go out in a life of work in an open economy in which individuals could choose their occupation and get out of the crippling continuity of economic hereditary occupations, and a democratic state which would confer on its citizens the right to act in a participatory public sphere. Emancipation from European control was desirable because colonialism blocked the realisation of modernity. For Gandhi, independence meant the historical opportunity to move out of the forcible imposition of European modernity on India; for Nehru, modernity was a universally desirable condition, but imperialism created a two-speed world in which serious modernity in the colonies was either partially realised, or perpetually deferred. Colonies required independence precisely because they wanted to break out of the systematic imperialist provision of inferior versions of modern life. Gandhi remained indispensable for Indian nationalism during the anti-colonial movement; after freedom, his political imagination went into abeyance with a peculiar rapidity. The nation-state after independence ignored Gandhi's politics in exchange for a general ritual celebration of his life and death. His removal from the scene left the field entirely open for a retrospective re-interpretation of the purposes of the national movement by a highly modernist elite led by Nehru and organised around an ideology of comprehensive state reformism.

This modernist elite which assumed power through somewhat fortuitous circumstances had an entirely Jacobin conception of the state. They used a strong distinction between the state and the society it governed precisely to view it as an instrumentality, rather than an organic growth, which should reflect the society's cultural habits. The state was conceived in really revolutionary terms – its task was precisely to drag into a modern age a largely reluctant, conservative society, directly attacking its unjust and reactionary practices. Nehru conceived of the state as a vast, bureaucratic instrument of collectively-willed, elite-directed social change, drawing the sanction for this proposal for radical social transformation from philosophical readings of history rather than instant support of his people, although during his tenure as Prime Minister he enjoyed entirely secure elective majorities. The state's role was critical in two major areas of reform. First, India's backwardness was attributed to the imperialist exploitation, but more strictly to neglect of industrial development under colonial rule. In Nehru's clever mixture of Marxist and Fabian political ideals, political sovereignty was never secure without serious industrial development, particularly growth of heavy industries. Continuing dependence on former colonial powers for complex technology and capital goods seemed to Nehru to threaten the real core of sovereignty.

Accordingly, the Indian state began to expand its economic role frenetically after independence – with serious long-term historical consequences. True, Nehru inherited the framework of the British colonial state; but in the next two decades, this state changed its character in some fundamental respects. First, from a state concerned primarily with political order and tax collection, it turned into a vast economic machine, striving to affect the functioning of the entire productive economy in two ways. It legislated a huge framework of protective laws to shield Indian industry from foreign competition, but it also exacted a heavy price by imposing an intricate network of rules of bureaucratic approval. By using the reformist imaginary of the state, Nehru's government easily established a firm directive control over Indian industries – which was to turn destructive in later decades. Secondly, the Nehruvian state was not content with merely directing industrial investments of the private sector; it decided that the Indian bourgeoisie lacked the capital required for establishing large-scale industries and purchasing advanced technology. Starting from slightly experimental moves in the early years, from the 1956 Second Five Year Plan, it rapidly constructed a large public sector of directly state-run industries. Commonly, observers emphasise the continuity between the colonial and the Nehruvian state; but their discontinuities are at least equally significant. The political history of Asia and Africa are full of examples of states which simply inherited colonial bureaucracies, with a tired political imagination, which could not achieve any significant imaginative integration with their peoples. As they moved away from contact with popular aspirations, these states degenerated into personal or military tyrannies, or simply crumbled into inefficacy. The Indian state was an exception. After independence, the Indian nationalist state produced a new, powerful imagination for itself, which re-connected it to popular aspirations, which allowed the Indian state to continue its successful career, despite disapproval from both camps in the Cold War. There were two crucial factors in this unusual success of a state which managed to install democracy without conditions of economic prosperity. The first was the manner in which it captured the imagination of the emergent modern elites. Despite its stark and obvious failures in various fields – removal of poverty, provision of primary education, achieving respectable rates of long-term economic growth, or distributive justice, the state supervised a rapid growth of a modern middle class. This might have accentuated internal inequality, but the absolute size of this middle class created a substantial enclave of contentment with the state's performance. By allowing the market economy to develop, albeit slowly, and by creating a rapidly expanding state sector of the economy which required the expansion of a supervising bureaucracy, this state earned the gratitude of the new middle classes, the aspiring and confident entrants into this modern mixed economy. At the same time, the Nehruvian state retained at least an ideological commitment to social reform and distributive justice – though slow and insubstantial economic growth threw the state increasingly upon the resources of the modern elites, and slowed down the prospects of any serious income redistribution.

The Nehruvian state also appealed powerfully to subaltern imaginations of politics. Through the design of the new constitution, it undertook an immense project of social reform, using the state as the primary instrument to tear down the thousand years' indignities of the caste system. This caught the imagination of the lower orders of Indian society in a different but equally potent fashion. All previous states had accepted defeat in the face of the historical persistence of the caste order, although the colonial state had begun to provide for limited political representation to the lowest castes. By adopting a reformist constitutional system, the Nehruvian state declared the 'sovereignty' of the state in deciding social principles and legislated the basic rules of the caste system invalid – an unprecedented move that could not be achieved by any previous state, or by sporadic efforts of religious reformers. By the constitutional abolition of untouchability, and a system of reservation in three sectors – electoral representation, government employment and educational institutions – the independent state made the first fundamental attack against the normative legitimacy and institutional power of the caste system. The constitutional initiative on caste eventually yielded two consequences. It is generally accepted now that the ameliorative results of the reservation policies were very slow, affected a small segment of the lowest castes, and were consequently seen as largely symbolic – conferring on the lowest sections of Indian society a ritualistic formal citizenship which the state could not actually translate into effective redistribution of dignity, not to speak of incomes. But this small segment of upwardly mobile elite from the lowest castes secured for their communities a symbolic dignity, a staged equality with other bearers of power in state institutions. It is remarkable that, despite the formal openness of the competitive market, it did not produce a single lower caste or untouchable millionaire; and despite all the failings of the ponderous state, it produced a real stratum of bureaucrats from the lowest castes, and eventually, the elective apparatuses of the state also produced a stratum of important politicians who sat on the central cabinet, ruled large states as chief ministers, and eventually one of ascended the post of the President of the republic. Despite the undoubtedly nominal character of this elevation, this process

changed the normative template of Hindu society. Paradoxically, the slowness of this process and its largely ritualistic character also produced in vast masses of the lower castes an indignant sense of urgency in demanding their rights. This has expressed itself in a strange transformation of the basic language of Indian politics – its intriguing turn towards the vernacular. Electoral politics in India mainly happens now in the vernacular – both in a literal and a symbolic sense. Since the late seventies, parliamentary politics went through an amazing transformation – in its personnel and language. During the Nehru period, politics was almost entirely an arena for upper middle class politicians, wedded to ideologies like liberalism and socialism, disputing their claims in chaste English in India's numerous legislative chambers. By the late seventies, they were replaced by politicians from lower social strata, with less or more vernacular education, whose political imaginations and practical pre-occupations were startlingly different. Western ideologies like liberalism and socialism simply disappeared from the language of political contestation which acquired a new kind of intensity and was entirely about the question of dignity and resentment against the unacceptable sluggishness of caste emancipation. Thus, while politics since the seventies became undoubtedly more participatory and in that sense democratic, it also became unmistakably more vernacular, caste-oriented and non-western. The movements of democracy in India have become historically peculiar: it has become more Indian while it has become more democratic.

From the point of view of comparative political theory, the Indian case illustrates an interesting point. In modern Indian political life the central conflict was about two views of the state, represented by Gandhi and Nehru. One of them demanded a limitation of the state's powers, the other an unambiguous expansion. Yet, this was not a re-enactment of the European conflict between liberal and socialist theory. I have sought to prove that the limitation that Gandhi wanted was very different from liberal theory. What Nehruvianism eventually came to represent was also quite distinct from socialism; because the state had little success in its redistributive agenda. Yet it was not a failed socialist state: it succeeded in something else. The correct characterisation for this would be a pure 'statism', without a strong redistributive expectation. It was literally a poor people's version of the welfare state which had too little revenue to provide them with normal everyday welfare, but came to their rescue with a desperate mitigation of crises.

It has been suggested that the Congress system (Kothari 1964,1970) – or what I have more grandly called the Nehruvian state – was based upon a consensus. This is misleading if consensus implies different political groups reaching agreement on the same principles; it is more accurate to say that in the Nehruvian state there was a historic convergence of radically different expectations. The upper classes saw it as an instrument of economic growth primarily for themselves, and in the immediate future. Lower strata in Indian society were drawn to it by the promise of social dignity, an end of the caste system, and a distant dream of economic re-distribution. But the two dreams, and their divergent justifications, were equally real for the relevant groups to repose their faith in the modern nation-state.

But in a certain sense, a distinction between the Congress government and 'the Nehruvian state' is crucial for understanding what is happening in Indian politics at the current stage. 'The Congress system' fell into decay by the seventies, and Congress fortunes were revived briefly by Indira Gandhi through a quite different kind of political system. By the eighties, even the restructured system had failed the Congress, and Congress's conception of a pluralist Indian nation was being seriously challenged by an aggressive Hindu nationalism. A subtle and interesting shift has taken place in the imaginative universe of Indian politics through all these political changes. All forms of collective belonging – the Hindu community, the secular Indian nation, the pluralist Indic civilisation – have come under increasing sceptical criticism. In some parts of India's territorial boundaries, there are movements of radical separation from the conventional idea of the Indian union. Since the early nineties, Indian governments have implemented an expanding programme of economic liberalisation which necessarily wants to shrink the powers and the spheres of operation of the state.

Reading the state

All these confusing and conflicting aspirations and the inevitable disappointments that historical experience has brought along has destroyed the legitimacy of the state, but done something strange to the exact location of its image in political imagination. The sense of the state that has survived can be clarified by a series of negations in the popular imagination. It is seen as distinct from governments at the state or the centre, run by the Congress or the BJP, which are seen as corrupt, inefficient, and in case like Gujarat, murderous. It is distinct from the bureaucracy, which is widely regarded as elitist, indifferent and always carrying a faint stench of corruption. It is not the army and

the police which are dreaded and hated by large parts of the population for being violent and venal. In normal political discourse, the state comprises of the army, the bureaucracy, the government; in Indian popular imagination, it is made strangely distinct from all these institutions. This is what has made it difficult to read what is the precise locus of this conception of the state, because it is not to be found at places where we are accustomed to search for its presence. Yet its distinctive presence as powerful regulatory idea is unmistakable. It is implicitly invoked in every demand for justice, equality, dignity, assistance - because all such demands can be made only in its name; and it is the state's responsibility to meet all these expectations. Ordinary Indians see the operations of this state in many tangible events which can not have happened without it. The poor, for whom this state should have been the most difficult to discern, see its presence in the way the right to property is put in abeyance when they squat on government land, or encroach on private property. (See Chatterjee, 2004) They see it as the obvious provider of relief after natural calamities. They see it as provider of education and as recourse in extreme cases of distress. What is significant in a narrative of the state is that disadvantaged groups who volubly declare their disillusionment with the Indian nation, its offer of common citizenship, and are bitterly resentful of all incumbent or potential governments, still need something like a strangely disembodied idea of the state to articulate their grievances. The idea of the state has gone through an astonishing transformation. It has cut itself loose from its attachment to the conceptions of the nation, but has attained a strange apotheosis as the only repository of people's moral aspirations. All other normal repositories of public and collective life – governments, bureaucracies, communities, the nation have lost some of their legitimacy in a rising tide of undirected and uncontrollable social aspiration, except a distant, second-order, spectral, moral idea of the modern state. Its attributes are strangely familiar: it is capable of knowing everything, doing everything, removing all obstacles, punishing wrongs, showing mercy, averting evil. There is no end in sight of the Indian society's strange enchantment with the modern state.

Theoretical miscegeneation

Must follow the miscegeneation of the state as the European state began to speak and act in the vernacular. Eventually, what resulted was something emergent, not an institutional form in which one form of the state was defated by the other – that was how this historical process was earlier viewed by received theories of modern social science which had a recognizable bias towards the European and the modern not merely in power but also in the most fundamental moves of its cognition.