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Being a State in India: From Modern Traditionality to Modern Cosmopolitanism – A
Historical Overview

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of
Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Kakul Hai

Committee in charge:

Professor Steve Parish, Chair
Professor David Pedersen
Professor Rupert Stasch

2011

The Thesis is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on
microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Being a State in India: From Modern Traditionality to Modern Cosmopolitanism – A
Historical Overview

by

Kakul Hai

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Steve Parish, Chair

The paper will provide a historical evaluation of the process of State formation: the State as it existed in pre-colonial India, its development through successive periods of colonization, and the attempts that were made towards the (re) formation of State after India gained independence from colonial rule in 1947. Although the post-independent State is not the main focus of the paper, parallels with the contemporary modern State, as attempts have been made for its establishment since 1947, have been drawn with earlier epochs. A main purpose is to dispel the notion that State-formation in India was a discontinuous process, and that the contemporary State in India is a result of the sudden eruption of modern Statehood under foreign rule. Instead, continuity in the process of State-formation has been emphasized to make clear that the roots of the kind of nation-state that exists in

contemporary India can be traced back to foundations that were laid down in the country several centuries ago. The paper concludes with a discussion of the thoughts and writings of Rabindranath Tagore who, in my view and as an attempt has been made to portray, represents, through his literary writings and views on education in particular, a personification of, what he calls, a “cosmopolitan Indian.” The discussion of Tagore, although not directly concerned with the State, is a befitting conclusion portraying the development of the Indian people at the brink of entering, and making their mark in, an increasingly interactive and globalized world at large.

Introduction

The organization of nation-states in the political sphere of the modern world system requires each nation-state to express its collective identity, to be placed within an “identity slot,” through an active process of ideological articulation. Furthermore, each nation-state, “in order to recognize itself, to speak of itself – or to recognize itself when spoken for – a collectivity must be defined by what it is not, and why it is not what it desires to become” (Hansen, 1999). The “nation” or “the people,” depending upon the conceptual grammar used for its description, have a historical trajectory of coming into the being of their present state, and the chosen identity slot that they place themselves in is endowed with a certain set of historical referents and infrastructure that contributed towards their composition¹.

For India, the identifying trademark that most accurately represents the country’s collectiveness with its inherent diversity would be pluralism. The idea of India as a pluralistic nation has been repeatedly emphasized by Tharoor (1997): “Pluralism is a reality that emerges from the very nature of the country; it is a choice made inevitable by India’s geography and reaffirmed by its history.” In a similar vein, Sen (2005) has remarked, “heterodoxy (is) the natural state of affairs in India.” India cannot be described in terms of a singular “essence,” which would not provide an accurate description of the substance, or soul, of the country. Attempts have been made in the recent political history of the country, however, to describe ‘Indianness’ as singularly represented by Hindutva (meaning, the quality of Hinduism), owing to the historical and cultural fact of the Hindu tradition dating back over three thousand

¹ According to Hansen (1999), these historical referents also tend to enclose the public identifications of nation-states into, what he calls, “ideological knots” – “a kind of historically accumulated closure that they cannot escape without getting transformed into something different.”

years into the past, thereby posing a challenge and threat to the pluralistic nature and identity of the country (Sen, 2007), as a collective nation as well as for each individual Indian. However, the hardcore advocates of the Hindutva political campaign are relatively few in number, and were only briefly influential in the political realm of the country (discussed in further detail later).

Even the usage of the term ‘modern,’ in describing the State of India, needs to be understood within the context of the historical development and evolution of the State in India, which at various times could have represented modernity in different ways (LaPalombara, 1963²). Such an attitude has been evident in generations of foreigners who have inhabited the territorial geography of the country, up until the establishment of the Mughal Empire at least. The British rule in India can be categorized separately, since that was an era of the colonization of the country. India as a colony of the British Empire was a different India from what it had been before the British rule, even though it was under the governance of foreign rulers.

The country won its independence from formal British rule on August 15, 1947. It has been only 62 years, so far, that India has been a domestically and internally governed country. The establishment of the country as an independent nation has been a complex process, with several purposes being served at the same time. The setting up of a systematic government that allows the smooth functioning of the country, the understanding of what freedom from external rule means for the people of the country, the transition of the Indian psyche from being a colonized nation to being a nation of people responsible for their own welfare, recognizing the

² According to LaPalombara (1963), the general notion of political modernity can mean different things to different people, depending on the specific attributes of political modernization as they apply to particular nation-states.

inadequacies and insufficiencies inherent in their own nation and their own people without having the opportunity of attributing failings to an external presence overriding their own free will. In addition, constant reminders of their past history present all around and, at the same time, looking ahead with a progressive outlook, recognizing the particular characteristics of each region, or state, in the country together with identifying themselves as, though a pluralistic, yet a collective nation, and discovering and establishing their place and position amongst all the other nations of the world.

In describing India's plurality, Tharoor (1997) says: "Everything exists in countless variants. There is no single standard, no fixed stereotype, no 'one way.' This pluralism is acknowledged in the way India arranges its own affairs: all groups, faiths, tastes, and ideologies survive and contend for their place in the sun." It is in this sphere of plurality that the modern Indian State can be located. The plurality and multiplicity of Indian culture and society lends the institutional landscape of the State a certain degree of dispersion and incoherence, which allows the various political parties in the present parliamentary democracy system of governance to wield political forces to provisionally unify sections of Indian society, thereby turning the State into a "powerful instrument of domination and societal reform" (Hansen, 1999), and endowing the State with sovereign authority over the people it is governing. This unity and coherence of the State is constructed via a "State project" that mobilizes those political forces that are capable of "reforming administrative routines, remolding institutions, and redirecting fiscal flows" (Hansen, 1999). However, even in a parliamentary democracy system, which is based on representation of the interests of larger social groups, most elected parties and organizations tend to

produce their own cause. And by doing so, the representative parties and organizations are actually striving to produce the larger group, their interest and culture, for which they claim to be the mere vehicles. In such case, like in any other political or State project, the interests and propositions of certain social groups are excluded from influence, “while furthering the political interests, social vision, and position of the social groups that the State project seeks to represent and consolidate” (Hansen, 1999).

Within the workings of the State, the identities, and their associated descriptions, assumed by political parties and organizations get imposed upon the larger groups they are representing, which in the multi-party system of governance and representation in India lends a certain amount of difficulty towards unification and consolidation. On the other hand, it also leads to highly stimulating political debates in the country. The latter are an opportunity for the education of the public in principles of parliamentary democracy, of which every citizen of the country is a part. The “toiling masses,” however, tend to get excluded from such education, and their political mobilization for participation in the affairs of the State are conducted in different ways, mostly based on ideas and themes rallying around mass appeal that are often times emotionally-charged (the short-period success of the Hindutva movement in the 1990s can be understood within this context).

What is it that makes India, an amalgam or a melting pot, sustain itself as a diverse, plural yet unified nation, functioning on principles of democratic governance that have made India a successful democracy since 1947, despite having experienced various crises in its political institutions, in the past as well as in the present? What is the vision that Indians have or should have of themselves as products of the historical

events that the country has experienced over the past several centuries, and the subsequent trajectory of development that the country has taken in today's era of a globalized and interactive world-order? Before we try to construct an understanding of the contemporary and modern Indian State, and how Indians project themselves, it is important to trace the history of the State's development in India, from the time India was divided into several independently functioning kingdoms and princely states, through the periods of colonization, the nationalist movement for India's independence from the last set of colonizers through to India's independence, and the establishment of an independent nation-state in 1947³.

In regards to the first part, in this paper I will be providing a description of the process of State formation: the State as it existed in pre-colonial India, its evolution through successive periods of colonization, and the attempts made towards the (re) formation of State post-1947. The State post-independence may not be part of the main focus of this paper, and is a topic that can be addressed more sufficiently and adequately as a separate paper, but parallels with the modern State, as attempts have been made for its establishment since 1947, will be drawn with the earlier time periods. A main purpose is to dispel the notion that State-formation in India was a discontinuous process, and that the contemporary State in India is a result of the sudden eruption of modern Statehood under foreign rule. Instead, continuity in the process of State-formation will be emphasized to make clear that the kind of nation-state that exists in contemporary India is rooted in foundations that were established several centuries ago. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the thoughts and

³ I'm using the concept of the State because the State would be the best overall representation of Indian pluralism, that is, an understanding of the State will be derived from a historical account of Indian pluralism. It should be noted that the notion of pluralism is not limited to religious pluralism, as expressed in the secular aspect of the country, although secularism is an integral constituent of the nature of Indian Statehood.

writings of Rabindranath Tagore who, in my view and as I shall try to portray, represents, through his literary writings and views on education in particular, a personification of, what he calls, a “cosmopolitan Indian.” A Cosmopolitan Indian is one who exists at the intersection and meeting point of several social, cultural, and political influences, and, perhaps more importantly, an Indian who is open to diverse experiences and focused on the progress of the person as an individual as well as the community that constitutes the nation as a whole.

Researchers like Khilnani (1999) have stated that the State as a sovereign authority did not exist in pre-colonial India. The process of State formation began under colonialism, when the State, in the literal sense, came into existence (Kaviraj, 1984). Such a view professes a complete break between the “weak and marginal” State of traditional India, in comparison to the modern State in present India with its “coercive power and systemized administration” (Tanabe, 2006). However, based on a historical evaluation, the conception of a complete break between the pre-colonial State and the modern State cannot be maintained. Though it may be true that a radical change occurred in the concept and structure of the power of the State in terms of its sovereignty and legitimacy under colonialism, a traditional model of Statehood did exist in pre-colonial India that served the purpose of maintaining social order, despite being encompassed within the religious domain which defined status (of groups of individuals) in the pre-colonial caste-based society [Dirks (1987), Raheja (1988), Levy (1990), Quigley (1993)]. An understanding of the State in India, therefore, needs to be contextualized in the history of its own development, the changes and reformulations it has gone through over a span of time, as opposed to the viewpoint of the State as a colonial import, and any crisis or malfunctioning of the State in India a

result of the inability of the country to effectively adopt and enact a Western model of Statehood.

For the purposes of this paper, I'm going to trace the history of the State in India through the pre-colonial and colonial periods, with intermittent comparisons and parallels with the post-colonial State. The main question is about the position and legitimacy of the State vis-à-vis society, and what kind of dialectic relationship the two have shared over the course of Indian history. In pre-colonial India, the functioning and sovereignty of the State was intimately tied to the social system (the Hindu caste system, in particular, for most of the states in those times), and the State's sovereignty was not completely independent of the power structures and cultural norms of society. The various foreign invasions, up until the British when a colonial rule in the country was established, were concerned with the integration⁴ of foreign invaders into the fabric of Indian society, as well as the integration and unification of the different, independently functioning princely states into a single nation. During this period of pre-colonialism, I will be looking at the kind of State and system of governance that existed in India, and chart the course of its development.

During British colonialism, the State established itself as a separate entity from Indian society, a necessary condition for the existence of a State in the modern form, and the State's authority and legitimacy took precedence over the social and cultural constitution of the country. On the part of the British, this step was primarily carried out for the purposes of establishing control by the British colonial government over the Indian subcontinent. The various divisions of the Indian society, based on

⁴ Dirks has differentiated between the earlier "settlers," and the "others" which were the British colonizers.

caste, class, religion etc., were made salient, there was an altering of the cultural power structure, and the State derived its legitimacy and sovereignty from the differences thus created. Since the governance of the country was in the hands of a foreign colonial ruler, the State was able to establish some kind of independence from the social and cultural fabric of the country, and introduce new forms of governance, mostly derived from the British system (which, in turn, was a part of a larger process of nation-building and state-formation taking place in Europe, the Americas and other parts of the world, in the creation of a interactive world-system of governance).

State governance in post-independence (post-colonial) India, though not sufficiently delved into in this paper but worth mentioning within context, can be further divided into different phases, depending on the form of national government that has existed in the country since 1947. In the early years of independent India, a democratic system of governance was established, in which the State maintained its supremacy over society, but an attempt was made to ensure that all segments of the Indian society found representation in the governance of the country, through elected representatives. The sovereignty of the State was mostly in the hands of the Congress (political) party, a position they had acquired from their role and participation in the freedom movement. However, the legitimacy of the Congress came under severe questioning during the Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi, who, by imposing Emergency rule in the country for a few years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, established complete authority (bordering on dictatorship) of the State. The following years saw the resurgence of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which was able to control the governance of the country by riding on a Hindu nationalist wave, bringing the mainly Hindu cultural constitution of Indian society to the forefront.

The entry of the current Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, as the Finance Minister in the early 1990s, ushered in an era of economic reforms starting in 1991, and the State in India was redefined. I'm further interested in what the State in India is currently like, with its increasing participation in global affairs and international relations, while at the same time a crisis in the internal governability of the country is becoming a topic for debate, owing largely to the multi-party system representing the various and diverse segments of Indian society, and the increasing dominance of these segments especially at the level of state governments. So in the internal governance of the country, the dialectics between the central government and the state governments gives rise to the question of what would constitute as adequate governance of the country. And where does the State, as a sovereign and legitimate authority, stand in the crisis afflicting various political institutions involved in State governance in contemporary India. The interests posed in this paragraph may not be completely touched upon within the larger scheme of the paper, but a more detailed analysis of these questions will be done in a different paper.

The State/Kingdom in Pre-Colonial India

The contemporary Indian State has been described as experiencing a “growing crisis of governability” in the form of the “crisis of political institutions” in India (Hansen, 1999). It is a question of the legitimacy of the State in relation to its position vis-à-vis society, and the discontentment toward the functioning of the State is in large part due to the State's inability to fulfill the expectations of the people in its governing capacity, a huge responsibility that the State has taken upon itself. The crisis of the institutions in India has been in conjunction with an erosion of the norms and values of traditional Indian culture (Mohapatra, 1997); however, such a

perception is also in part due to an attempt to maintain the sovereignty of the Indian State, as established under British colonial rule, as separate from and independent of the hierarchical structure and its associated cultural norms in Indian society post independence. Only then, Thapar (1984) points out, can there be true development of the State. The question to investigate here is whether the State as it exists in contemporary India is an entirely new introduction by the British colonial rule, or whether it is a revised continuation of the kind of State that existed in pre-colonial India. In the former case, the present State in India would be viewed as an imitation of a model of Statehood as it existed in the West, and an evaluation of State functioning and governance is dependent on the success or failure of the Indian State to emulate such a Western model. In the latter case, however, the present Indian State would be viewed as part of the formation of “the historical process of redefinition of its structure in relation to the particular nature of Indian society,” and an “understanding of the Indian state will be contextualized in its own history of structural development over a longer span of time” (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006).

To formulate a picture of the present form of State in modern India, the journey needs to begin in the time period classified as pre-colonial India, prior to the successive periods of invasions and subsequent colonization. Traversing through the history of India, whether in respect to the geographical territories of the various states in the region, or in terms of the historical evolution of modern Statehood, a first and foremost understanding of “Indian India” needs to be acquired, followed by the dialectical interaction between what constitutes as “Indian India” and the India that has been shaped, molded and transformed by the various, can we say non-Indian India, influences throughout the history of the country. It’s a matter of essences versus

pluralism. As Barton (1934), in his historical analysis of the states in India, sums it up, “The contrast between the everyday life of the people who are ruled from Imperial Delhi and those who live under the Durbars is almost as great as the divergence in the political ideals of Indian India and those of the Indian politician of the Round Table Conference. They are almost different worlds. The India of ancient tradition, the India that enshrines the achievements of Indian political genius, is to be found at their best in the states.” Barton (1934) is referring to the Durbars of the Mughal period, where State assemblies were held and are equivalent to the present-day parliament, the arena of political discourse and debate and the place where all legislative and policy decisions are made regarding governance. His observance should be noted as evidence of the existence of a State-like system of governance even before the British.

To reiterate, the main question in this section of the paper concerns the position and legitimacy of the State vis-à-vis society, and what kind of dialectic relationship the two have shared over the course of Indian history. In pre-colonial India, the State was more or less embedded within society and its functioning and sovereignty was intimately tied to the social system without a clear-cut separation from the power structures and cultural norms in society.

In Hindu society, worldly and other-worldly (spiritual and religious) powers were in the hands of two different specialists, the King and the Brahmin priest, respectively. The religious power held by the priest took precedence over the secular power of the King, whose main duty was to uphold the maintenance of the caste system, which functioned in accordance with the moral order of *dharma* (Kolenda, 1978). The cultural norms of society were guided by this principle of *dharma*, which has been described by Lingat (1973) as “essentially a rule of interdependence,

founded on a hierarchy corresponding to the nature of things necessary for the maintenance of social order.” *Dharma* was also intricately linked to the prevalent religious law, and for this reason the King was required to always carry out his duties under the guidance of the priest, considered to be in possession of ritualistic religious knowledge (Levy, 1991).

For the King to carry out his threefold duties of protecting the populace, maintaining social order as established by the caste system, and waging war, he was required to transcend the “ordinary” Hindu community *dharma*, in order to be successful as a King; but, on the other hand, he was also a part of the whole community, and as a citizen of the community, he operated within the ordinary *dharma*. The former denotes the warrior capacity of the King’s duty, described by Levy (1991) as follows: “In his warrior’s relation to the city’s external enemies, his manipulative relations to the city’s allies, and in his use of violence and power to enforce those *internal* violations of the civic *dharma* which that *dharma*’s sanctions of moral disapproval and karmic retribution cannot in themselves fully control, he must ignore the morality of interdependence and must perform acts which within the ordinary civic order would be sins.”

The destiny of the King was dependent on the successful protection of his subjects, for the purposes of which he could step outside of the *dharma* constituting the moral and social order of the community as a whole. The breaking of this cultural norm of Hindu society was not considered a sin for the individual person, serving in the position of King, even though the King was simultaneously a citizen of the community he was governing over. This deviation from the cultural and societal norm

was allowed because it was for the purpose of carrying out the duties of the position of the King, and which had the sanction of the religiously ordained priests.

To provide further description of the structure of society and its inter-relatedness with governance in pre-colonial India, the State/Kingdom was constituted of seven elements, as laid down in the *Manusmriti* (written around the first/second century AD):

1. King.
2. Minister (system of government/bureaucratic organization).
3. City (cities and citizens).
4. Domain/territory (territory and provincial inhabitants).
5. Treasury (financial affairs in general).
6. Army (military power).
7. Ally (international relations centered on a particular state).

The State operated as an organic system, where “each one of the seven elements has its own particular characteristic and can be the most important factor in its respective purposes.” However, in the event of a disaster, the preceding element surpassed the succeeding one, hence the seven elements are placed in that particular order. In the *Arthashastra* though, written by Kautilya in 300 BC, the order of city (as province) and domain/territory (as the fortified city) is reversed. Despite the heavy importance of each element on its own, the State was an organic system where the King was considered the most important element in serving the function of integrating all the six elements and, thereby, determining the destiny of the State (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006). The primary duty of the King was to provide protection to the people in his kingdom, and to maintain social order. The King who did not fulfill his duty

was fated to be ousted by the people. The sovereignty of the State depended upon the ability of the King to integrate the six elements into the organic system of governance, but to successfully fulfill that purpose, each element had to contribute towards the maintenance of the system as a whole.

In the modern state, the State's sovereignty has come under question because a demand for imposed limitations on the State's sovereignty have arisen due to an increasing number of supra-national and sub-national committees and groups, each with their own specific concerns and agendas (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006). The system does not function as it used to earlier, because the elements constituting the system have become fragmented, and the maintenance of the social order, for the smooth and effective functioning of the State, is not of primary concern, owing to the dominance of specific interest groups within the territory of the State. Such is the nature of the multi-party system of parliamentary democracy as it is currently practiced in India.

For nations that have freshly gained independence from colonized rule, the formation of a State with a national government that not only governs but also serves the people, the basis of a democratic government, is of paramount importance. A State, though not in its contemporary modern form, existed in traditional pre-colonial India when the country consisted of separate kingdoms, akin to individual states as the country is constituted at present. One vital difference between the State in pre-colonial India and the modern State is that though the King in pre-colonial India held the position of the sovereign, he/she had no power or authority to make laws, a limitation that further served the purpose of providing a check to royal absolutism and absolute monarchy. The rights of the people took precedence over the rights of the King, who in turn was obligated to "rule without a rival to the love of his people." As

Kautilya summarized the role of the King in *Arthashastra*: “the King’s happiness lies in the happiness of his people, in their good lies his good; nothing is good for the King which pleases his own self alone; his good inheres in what is conducive to the pleasure of his people” (Chakrabarti, 1961).

The King was subject to a higher source of sacred law, derived from the Vedas, which were philosophical teachings laying out “the right path that leads to moral as well as material good of mankind.” At a later period, secular political teachers appeared for the education of the Princes and the Kings, and it was only thereafter that the sovereign power to make laws was vested in the authority of the King.

In the sovereign power vested in the King, the emphasis was always on the responsibility of the sovereign position of the King instead of the rights of the King. To Western critics, such emphasis on righteousness makes the politics of pre-colonial India too religiously-laden to be politics per se. A reason for such a perception could be that life in pre-colonial India was not compartmentalized, and “politics, economics, religion and the day-to-day life, its social contents, were all parts of one organic whole, and what made it a one whole was the application of one dominant value to all these” (Chakrabarti, 1961). And since the main purpose of individual life was to attain happiness as the end of all pursuits by following the path of righteousness for the good of all mankind as laid down in the various scriptures from which laws and rules of living were derived, the dominant umbrella value in pre-colonial India was considered to be spiritual, in comparison to the dominant value of the West being material. The overt practice of the ritualistic aspect of religion tends to create the impression of the dominance of ritualistic religion in the country, overshadowing the

spiritual aspect. The latter was inherent in the way people were expected to conduct their affairs in everyday life, and is also visible in the organizing principle of pre-colonial Indian society and culture.

Caste-based hierarchical system of governance was not practiced in all the states in pre-colonial India. For example, in the Magadha kingdom, an Aryan State in the upper Ganga valley, where tribal Kingship prevailed, a *kshatriya* (second in the caste system hierarchy) was usually chosen as the successor to the throne of the King, but since the Kingdom of Magadha was relatively free of the *varna* social system⁵, a non-*kshatriya* could also rise to the rank of the King based on his abilities. “Kingship. . . belonged to him who possessed *ksatra* (“warlike force,” plus “sovereignty”) de facto, . . . i.e. the power to command, whatever might have been his birth and whatever might have been the circumstances which brought him to the throne. *Ksatra* confers on the King independence, the right to act to suit himself without depending upon anyone else. The King is independent of his subjects, as is the spiritual preceptor of his pupils and the head of the family of the members of his household” (Lingat, 1973). The King could therefore be either the supreme religious functionary, or the function of the King could be secularized through his dissociation from the religious priests, which left the King with power only (Dumont, 1970). In the latter case, a separation of the religious sphere from the political sphere occurs, and traces of the legitimacy of the state above the centrality of cultural norms, derived from the religious and spiritual traditions of the Hindu ideology, can be seen.

⁵ Division of Hindu society into four classes or castes in the following hierarchical order: the *brahmins* (clergy and teachers wielding religious authority); the *kshatriyas* (warriors, nobility and administrators, wielding political power); the *shudras* (peasants or unfree servants); the *vaishyas* (merchants and farmers or cattle-herders with economic prosperity).

The elected King had the blessings and the approval of the Gods, proof of which was the support received from the Brahmin priests, who were educated in the Vedic scriptures. The newly elected *kshatriya* King was thereby consecrated to the throne through Vedic rituals, this process a representation of the acceptance and acknowledgment of the King's divinity, attributed to his throne, and the legitimacy of his rule. In Magadha, however, the Kings emphasized administrative and military abilities, that is, maintenance of social order and protection of the people, as the basis of their legitimacy to rule, instead of the divinity ascribed to the throne and inferred onto the elected King through traditional rituals by the Brahmins, such as the enthronement ceremony at the time of coronation (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006). In addition, many of the Kings in Magadha rejected Brahmanical thought because it frowned upon economic and trade activities. Citizens of the Kingdom of Magadha who engaged in economic activities were considered "individuals," because engaging in unrestricted economic activity required them to be free from the tribe and *varna* social systems. Some of these people chose to embrace new religions that "rightly valued their economic activities" (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006).

Commercial activities were carried in Rajagrha, the capital of Magadha, by propertied citizens, generically called *grhapati* (*gahapati*), with the influential persons among them called *sarthavaha* (*satthavaha*, traders), and the citizens' representatives called *sresthin* (*setthi*). The urban traders established a kind of guild organization called *sreni* (*seni*) and *puga* and often worked in collaboration. Artisans, such as jewelers, ivory craftsmen, weavers, carpenters, and leather-workers, also organized similar groups. The strengthening of kingship in Magadha was a response to the expectations of the urban traders who were expanding their activities beyond the boundaries of tribal systems and territorial borders, and of the craftsmen

who supported the traders' activities by production, and also of the new religious organizations which were in the process of expansion.

The characteristic of non-interference of religious practices in the sovereign rule of the State is also present in the modern state in India. There is a separation of religion from the State, and a secular State has been established post-Independence, which nevertheless allows freedom to practice any religion and follow the associated religious laws. Religious matters mostly function at the societal level, not at the State level. The three branches of state governance, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, are separate from each other in the Indian Constitution. Religion comes under the jurisdiction of the judiciary in the handling of laws associated with different religions embraced by the secular State of India. "The law of the land determines the scope of religion in society; it is not religion that determines the scope of the law" (Mahmood, 2006). However, state practice ultimately does control religious matters to fulfill the Fundamental Duties (laid out in the Constitution) that are the national obligations of each citizen:

- to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities
- to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture

In explaining the conception of a secular State in India, Mahmood (2006) tells us: "Despite the clear incorporation of all the basic principles of secularism into various provisions of the Constitution when originally enacted, its preamble then did not include the word secular in the short description of the country, which it called a 'Sovereign Democratic Republic.' This was, of course, not an inadvertent omission

but a well-calculated decision meant to avoid any misgiving that India was to adopt any of the Western notions of a secular State. Twenty-five years later, by which time India's peculiar concept of secularism had been fully established through its own judicial decisions and state practices, the Preamble to the Constitution was amended to include the word 'secular' (along with 'socialist') to declare India to be a 'Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic'."

In modern India, people were imitating modernism and condemning religion, but unlike in the West, religion was not being replaced by reason. So when Gandhi proclaimed – "I am proud to be a Hindu," he was not propagating the superiority of the Hindu religion over the remaining religions in the country, he was simply implying that complete rejection of religion was not a sign of pure and reasonable modernity, as it applied to Indian society and culture (Chakrabarti, 1961). This could be a possible reason why the architects of the Indian Constitution did not declare India to be a secular State modeled on the Western conception of the secular State (because conditions of practice of religions differed) at the time of Independence, and instead waited to see what kind of secular State in India would emerge in the various judicial decisions and State practices once India was an independent nation-state and in-charge of producing its own welfare conditions, in this case, based on religious considerations.

Different religious groups are allowed to establish and maintain religious institutions of their choice, which the State shall not discriminate against, in order to maintain the religious liberties afforded to Indian citizens by the Constitution. However, to maintain the religious neutrality of the State, no State-controlled

educational institution is to provide religious instruction or services without consent (Mahmood, 2006).

To return to the State in pre-colonial India, the conception of the State as belonging to all people, regardless of their religious affiliations, was a viewpoint in agreement with the Hindu view. As stated in the *Sukraniti* – I: “God has created the King, though master in form, the servant of the people, getting his wages in taxes, and this for the protection and the growth (of the people) in all classes” (as quoted by Chakrabarti, 1961).

The primary restraint on the King was to be his conscience that would disallow him/her to feel any kind of contentment or satisfaction over and above or at the expense of the people he was governing over. But a King was not expected to be endowed with the natural gift of some kind of higher conscience at birth. The King needed to be trained in the art of rulership, and a mere theoretical learning was not sufficient for the establishment and maintenance of a sovereign welfare State, but striving for the ideal in practice was also necessary (Chakrabarti, 1961).

Kingship was always elective, in a way, in pre-colonial India, whether the elected King was from the ranks of noblemen and the royal family or chosen from amongst the village headsmen. Whether the election was conducted by the common people or by elected officials, the fact remains that the to-be elected King was required to prove his prowess and eligibility to be elected as the leader of the people in his kingdom or principality. Even though hereditary kingdom had become customary, the consent of the people was a necessary requirement. The people, together with the priests who held a position of high esteem, not necessarily for their religious affiliation but for their knowledge, provided a powerful check to the

authority and possible monarchy by the King. Even though in the actual practice of electoral representation these rules of election may not have always been followed, and “the people” were possibly restrained to the position of subjects to a monarchy, in terms of requirements the King was symbolically an elected official of the State, in a way as is the head of the State, that is the Prime Minister, in contemporary India. Therefore, the present form of electing a representative of the people in a democratic system of governance was prevalent since pre-colonial times and was not an alien or entirely new concept of a sovereign statehood system of governance introduced by the British following a Western model of Statehood. Which also explains why such a system of State and governance fit well with India post independence and has survived since then.

The form of State thus created in pre-colonial India required not only service to the people by the elected governing body, but also the active participation on the part of the people, whose welfare was the main purpose of the State, in the creation of a unified community. “There will be, for the individual, no surrendering of his self but working in cooperation to discover fulfillment along with others of the community. An individual does not function in a vacuum. He develops himself in fellowship along with other individuals; his development takes a perverse course when he develops at the cost of others; he develops properly when he has contributions from others, in the same way as he has to contribute to ‘the building up of the individuality of others’” (Chakrabarti, 1961).

Such consideration by the State-system makes a strong plea for economic considerations being placed above disputes of any other kind, including party politics and class privileges. The “ethical use of economics” determines the function of the

welfare state. “It is to work for all persons and all purposes – not only economic but also social and cultural. Only maximum good to the people can prove to the people that the state is meant for them.” Although the elements of general welfare are not all economic, the main issue of concern is not only what constitutes welfare for a whole set of people or population, but how this welfare can be brought about in practice. Further research on the distribution system established by the pre-colonial states and their utility and efficacy is required to support this point.

When economic welfare is taken as the index of measuring the quality of life of the people in a State, it becomes a “social process of realizing fundamental equalities and eliminating accidental inequalities” (Chakrabarti, 1961). The State would, in that case, require to properly and perhaps evenly distribute the wealth generated within the state by the various modes of production as well as in its transactions with other countries. In the past, the social determined the economic order within a State, while the social order itself was determined by several linked factors operating within the social and cultural context of the State. At present, the reverse appears to be true. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few affords them a special and privileged position, which thereby leads to a reordering of the social system of the State, to a large extent based on the utilization of wealth and how that distributes the holding of force and power within the various elements operating within the social system.

A simple solution to ensuring economic welfare, when it is the basis of social welfare in general, seems to be to transfer surplus wealth accumulated in places or by groups to satisfy the economic needs where necessary. However, such a solution is not an easy or simple one to achieve in practice. And neither is it a universal solution

that would apply to all social systems, owing to their different constitutions. Applying a Dumontian analysis of holism, the social system of India consists of several elements placed in several positions arranged in different orders, that are linked and connected, and together they form a whole that is responsible to the state. The distribution of wealth follows an uneven pattern because it has to be assessed by the contribution each element makes to the system, and the part each element plays in the production of the overall accumulated wealth of the state would be different depending upon the quantity of their production. In a way, this system amounts to a division of labor, where each element is serving a specific purpose in the process of production, and the connectedness and relatedness of each element makes the process of production an additive one, and only the quality of the end-product can be evaluated and assessed.

The downside of achieving economic welfare as a whole in a ordered social system appears in the form of irregular payment, unemployment, low wages, etc. and since all the problems need to be tackled simultaneously, a well-devised and purposive plan of the deployment of economic resources is required to be devised, involving fair distribution of resources to the various elements composing the whole system, while maintaining the growth of the whole. And the question of fair distribution becomes a tricky one because even though all the elements are inter-related, they are positioned in different rank orders, which limits equal distribution of resources to everyone.

Such a social system has existed in India since pre-colonial times, the foundations of which can be traced back to the Vedas. The philosophy written down in the Vedas, and upon which the governance of pre-colonial India was based,

differentiated between good things (happiness, health, survival, progeny, pleasure, calmness, friendship, knowledge and truth) and bad things (misery or suffering, sickness and injury, death, barrenness, pain, anger, enmity, ignorance or error, and untruth) on which practical moral judgments were based. Attainment of the highest good was to be each individual's goal, and this goal could only be achieved when the whole world could benefit from all the good things that the cosmos had to offer. The ordered course of things, therefore, was when the social and moral order worked in tandem with the natural order; it was only then that the truth of being or reality could be achieved, and this was the "law." These were universalized ethical principles in pre-colonial India and applied to kings and commoners alike (Bilimoria, Prabhu and Sharma, 2007).

There were, therefore, very clear and consistent conceptions of what was right and what was wrong, and everything that was considered wrong had to be avoided so as not to disturb the natural order. Knowledge of such, and more, Vedic philosophy was not available to all the people, which created positions based on privileges, but the entire society had to function on these principles to form a cohesive whole. Therefore, different groups, or classes, of people were formed, with each group/class serving a functional purpose in the complex and ordered system based on different sets of duties and moral codes.

The concept of choice was also taken into account, regarding whether the individual chose to follow the ordered duties and moral codes assigned to his or her own group, or not. Everything the individual does, in respect to social action and behavior, is not necessarily of a moral nature. Moral actions are only those that people have consciously reflected upon and chosen to do (Laidlaw, 2002, Robbins, 2007).

Though this may not appear in accordance with the concept of *dharma*, what needs to be remembered is that *dharma* was also the ideal mode of conduct required of each individual, which may not have always been achieved in the practice of everyday living. The consequences of chosen actions, whether they were rewarding for having deviated from the ordered course of things or whether they were punishments, are reflected in the idea of *karma*.

The concept of *karma* existed alongside the concept of *dharma*, which once again proves that the possibility of conscious reflection of moral behavior and choice of action was taken into consideration in the Hindu system of thought. Further support is in the form of the belief in reincarnation in Hinduism, according to which each individual is reborn as many times as it takes the individual to pay for the sins committed in his or her life until they are allowed to pass through the gateway of heaven. It is within the sphere of choice and decision-making that freedom of individuality can also be located, and constitutes a major part of being human, instead of the human being as a mere organic element in the social system, driven and conducted by the mechanizations of the ordered system that in itself are required for the system to function smoothly to fulfill the purpose of its establishment. This particular aspect of the Indian people also helped in the rise of nationalism against British colonial rule.

The classes that were created, probably by the Aryans who came to India around 2000 BCE from Euro-Asia and displaced the native Dravidians mostly from the North Indian region, were: the *brahmins*, for educational and religious tasks; *kshatriya*, for sovereign and defense tasks; *vaishya*, for economic and agricultural tasks; and *sudra*, for menial tasks. Ideally, the different functions assigned to the

different classes did not entail an uneven distribution of power among the different classes or entail a difference in rights and privileges, thereby creating a hierarchical formation, but that is not how the caste system operated in practice. The *brahmins*, especially in pre-colonial India when the kings were subject to the knowledge contained within the Vedic scriptures on the proper conduct of a king and how he should rule, held a position of privilege over the others because of their attainment of higher and esoteric knowledge, which was not available to the remaining members of the caste system because of the different functions assigned to their groups. The introduction of Western education into the country during the British Raj may have widened and extended the gap to socio-economic status as well, because knowledge of the English language was required for well-paying jobs. Lack of consideration of this facet of the Indian people could be taken as another reason why Tagore was opposed to the prominence given to Western education in India over locally and regionally produced literature (discussed later).

To return briefly to *dharma*, the concept emphasizes the human dimension to the organic unity proposed by the ordering of the social system (social, moral and natural). It “connotes the idea of that which maintains, gives order and cohesion to any given reality, and ultimately to nature, society and the individual” (Bilimoria, Prabhu and Sharma, 2007). *Dharma* was the law of the highest order in pre-colonial India, which even the king was required to adhere to. The concept of *dharma* makes society like a god, and “‘the people’ as a community of agents” (Parish, 1994). Public morality needs to be upheld and the will of the community taken into consideration, otherwise, lack of participation in community affairs runs the risk of community disapproval and enmity and isolation. The rules of society need to be followed, as is

also the case for the Newars in Nepal (Parish, 1994), however the ethical rules of community living and public behavior have been derived from the philosophical writings of the *Mahabhart*a and the *BhagvadGita*, which are based on the reasoning and rationality behind appropriate moral conduct, at the individual level as well as a member of a community and a participant in the affairs of the community (Sen, 2007). The viewpoints on public reasoning and argumentation expressed in the *Mahabhart*a, especially in the exchange between Krishna and Arjuna on the eve of the war, also provide the basis for some of the principles of democracy in India⁶.

In contrast, is the concept of individualism, where the individual as a single unit is responsible to the state, and in this context the concepts of human rights, equality and justice at each individual level play an important part in procuring welfare for the inhabitants of the state. In a holistic social system, these concepts also operate, but their constitution and application would be different.

The question of the relation between the ethical rules of a society, constructed in the form of law that all members of a society are required to follow, and individual morality, which allows freedom of choice, gets raised here, especially in the modern state where the misgivings of the hierarchical system are voiced and issues of human rights, of underprivileged, disadvantaged and minority groups, and social justice are actively fought for. Especially post 1947 when India was laying down its foundation as a newly independent nation-state. The Directive Principles of State Policy, which

⁶ More so in the aspect of the present Indian system of governance that allows for participatory democracy. Although recently, (in February 2010), the proposal for amendments to the Right to Information (RTI) Act have sparked a debate on the validity of participatory democracy in the country. The proposal for amendments has been brought up due to the incessant requests for information the government officials have received since the assign of the RTI Act, which also highlights the need for educating the Indian people in principles of democracy for their effective participation in the maintenance of a democratic system of governance, in the country.

provide guidelines for the framing of laws by the state, highlight some of the required considerations taken into account:

- The Directive Principles of State Policy aims at creating social and economic conditions so that the citizens can lead a good life. The social and economic democracy is constituted for the welfare state. Furthermore, the DPSP are essential to curb the power of the government and they act as an instrument used to measure the performance of the government.
- The Directive Principles of State Policy laid down by the Constitution puts forth that the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by promoting a social order in which social, economic and political justice is informed in all institutions of life. The State shall provide free legal aid in order to ensure equal opportunities for securing justice. The State shall endeavor to provide the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, within the limits of economic capacity. According to the principles, the State aims for securing right to an adequate means of livelihood for all citizens, to men and women, and offer equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Moreover, the State works to prevent the concentration of wealth and means of production in a few hands, and tries to ensure that ownership and control of the material resources is distributed to best serve the common good.
- The Directive Principles also separate the judiciary from the executive in public services. The principles provide that the State shall strive for the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. (Part IV, Constitution of India)

An Example of the Gana-Sangha States

In the historical evolution of statehood and forms of government, the Gana-Sangha kind of states would be placed at the stage before the formation of kingship, because of their tribal form of government, and seen as containing elements of the birth of kingship. In pre-colonial India, such states existed alongside kingship states. One major difference between Gana-Sangha states and kingship states is that in the former, no sovereign authority was vested in the position of a 'king,' to be occupied by one man. "There existed collective government by influential members of the ruling tribe," represented in the words *gana* and *sangha*, meaning 'community' and 'group.' European and Indian historians have referred to the Gana-Sangha state in pre-colonial India, like the states of Vrjis and Mallas, as a republic, or oligarchy (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006). In respect to the states of Vrjis and Mallas, they could have been Aryan tribes migrating from the West who maintained the tribal form of government, or they could have been indigenous non-Aryan people. Owing to the time period of the existence of such forms of statehoods, there are no pure historical records present to trace the accuracy of these historical assumptions, since the first systematic historical records of ancient India date from the period of Ashoka and the Mauryan dynasty. Most of the historical evidence regarding statehood in India prior to the Mauryan dynasty has been pieced together from religious scriptures and literature pertaining to Hinduism and Buddhism (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006).

The Gana-Sangha states had adopted the *varna* social system, so apart from the systematic division of the society or community, the humanitarian and overall welfare philosophy must have also prevailed. Based on the administration and system

of governance of the Vrijis (the Licchavis in particular), Gautama Buddha gave the following seven reasons to explain the reasons for the strength of such kind of state:

1. They hold meetings often and many people gather together.
2. They act in cooperation with each other.
3. They do not break traditional laws and do not establish new laws aimlessly.
4. They respect the elders and listen to their words.
5. They do not force or act violently against their women.
6. They worship the tumulus or shrines (*caitya/cetiya*) both inside and outside the cities and never let the offerings be exhausted.
7. They welcome and protect those who have completed their spiritual practices (*arahant*).

The idea of welfare⁷ in such a societal system of governance was not dependent on a king who looked over the affairs of all the people, but was distributed across a selected group of people who worked in cooperation to maintain order and welfare.

The center of political, economic, and cultural activities of the Licchavis was the meeting place called *santhagara*. The rajas gathered there regularly, discussed state politics, competed in martial arts, and invited and received the teachings of religious guides such as Buddha. The proceedings of the meetings were carried out according to set procedures by elected representatives. The fact that these procedures were very well organized can be seen in the rules of the Buddhist order laid down in the Vainaya Pitaka, which was presumably influenced by them. For instance, we can see such influence in the arrangements regarding convocation, qualification of membership, proceedings, principles of unanimity, mediation or decision by majority as the second best, and so on. Moreover, in the annotative literature of the later periods, it is mentioned of the judicial system of the Licchavis that seven stages of trials were required before the sentence was

⁷ Welfare here is to be understood as a systematic and central system of governance, overlooking the interests of the community.

decided for a suspected thief. It is difficult to imagine that such a complicated procedure was actually followed in practice, but it tells us something about the nature of the Gana-Sangha state (Kimura and Tanabe, 2006).

During the medieval to early modern and colonial periods, the study of the history of the state through the relation between society and economics becomes clearer. It was during this period that the influence of the rights-based social system on the prevalent form of the state can be seen. The rights-based system, referred to as *vatan* or *miras*, was mainly patrimonial in character, and has been described as a system that could place “claims upon shares of local products, certain socio-political roles, and ritual privileges and duties” (Tanabe, 2006). Such a state system operated on a sin-penance ideology⁸, which was the public code for proper behavior based on one’s position in the social system. Therefore, maintenance of social order and state stability was still dependent on the societal stratification into the *varna* social system, and ideas concerned with social justice held an important position. The physical aspect of the crime-punishment ideology, indicating the power of compulsion, was implemented by the state, while communal control was applied by the local society through caste penalty (Kotani, 2006). Though both the state and society derived their functioning from the sin-penalty ideology, they did so in a fairly independent and mutually complimentary manner. The state, however, held the monopoly in the maintenance of social order through coercive power, in the form of the military. The question that Tanabe raises is whether the state had a distinct and independent existence and authority over society in this patrimonial social structure in which both

⁸ Although in the analogy with pollution-purification, sin and pollution map onto each other, they are two different conceptualizations. Sin referred to any kind of immoral or amoral behavioral conduct for the individual in the enactment of social relations, pollution referred to any kind of physical contact with an untouchable. Pollution-purification, therefore, was a concept more rooted in the caste system and was directly applicable to the injustices inherent in the hierarchical structuring of the *varna* system of community, especially in its connection to administrative, political and economic activities assigned to the different segments of Hindu society.

appeared to be embedded, since for the state to be a state, it needs to be free both of the social relations of which it is composed and on the basis of which the state functions (Yamazaki, 2006).

On the economic side, a vibrant marketing and financial system had been developed in India between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, before the establishment of British colonial rule (Bayly, 1992). Tanabe (2006) gives the example of Orissa in the eighteenth-century as a 'sacrificer state and sacrificial community.' The state was based on a system of rights, or a system of entitlements and indicates an early modern development of a state where "administrative technologies of surveillance, numeration, calculation and recording had penetrated into the system of rights." The workings of the state and kingship in the case of Orissa were instrumental in the development of early modernity in the state, and during this time, the local came to acquire a more universal and trans-local importance. The subjectivity of the people to the divinity of the king, and later on, to the sovereignty of the state, was also a characteristic of the development of statehood during this period of early modernity, which is closely related to the systematic organization of statehood as it currently functions in contemporary India. The complementary relationship between the market and the kingdom was also a characteristic feature of this period.

Beginning from the 18th century, vibrant and dynamic politico-economic activities began to take place in India, leading to a transformation in the interrelationships between the state, market, the local community, and religion. The processes of indigenous capitalist development had begun to occur through the commercial and trading activities of the East India Company, marking the beginning of colonial domination. Scholars such as Bayly (1988) and Washbrook (1981) have

noted the dynamics of the pre-colonial Indian state and its capitalist tendencies and connected them to the development of colonial rule in India. As Washbrook (1988) stated, “colonialism was the logical outcome of South Asia’s own history of capitalist development.” Such a view, however, tends to undermine the agency and subjectivity of the Indian people in favor of their desire for power and wealth. The latter, however, return to prominence in academic scholarship in relation to the nationalist movement during the freedom struggle.

The State in (British) Colonial India

“This condition of the modern world-system sets it apart from previously existing world-empires with their elaborate all-embracing redistributive political structures, as well as from the small pre-modern autonomous mini-systems oriented toward ‘subsistence’ production. A central feature of this modern world-system, which originated in Europe in the sixteenth century, has been the tendency towards the state (or the nation-state) to become the general political form and towards the global extension of the interstate system” (Wallerstein, 1977).

The interstate system has been a deliberate invention of the modern world, a system in which multiple national identities are connected with each other in such a way as to render difficult the freedom of any one or single state within the interstate system to transform relations within the boundaries of its national territory. Such a state system has also created a balance of power,” composed of competing relations between core-states, to ensure no single nation attains “overwhelming supremacy,”

while the peripheral states⁹ have been controlled, mainly by colonial policies, to ensure their political subordination to the core-states, according to Wallerstein (1977). A historical investigation of the creation of the world-wide state-system is necessary to understand the motivations behind the establishment of the kind of state that the British established in India in the 19th century, especially since the present state in the country is based on the model of statehood established by the colonial rule. In this context, Tagore's fascination with non-European western and eastern ideas (later in the paper) can also be understood as an expression of his concept of cosmopolitan nationalism.

Bayly (1983) has stated that India was the most populous and the most sophisticated of Europe's formal colonial domains, and not just because such a system was created by the British during their 200 year rule. British rule crept into India via the route of maritime Bengal between 1757 and 1856 through the commercial and trading activities of the East India Company. It was only after 1856 that a desire for larger revenues prompted the British and the East India Company to establish an orderly administration system, which took away the last few remaining dregs of dominion held by the Mughals, mostly in the state of Awadh (now known as Uttar Pradesh) thereby bringing about an end to the vast Mughal Empire in India. The British conquest of India had itself begun from the state of Awadh (or Oudh), the home domain of the receding Mughal dynasty, when the ruler of Awadh was defeated by the British in 1764 and bound to a tributary alliance requiring the state of Awadh to pay an annual subsidy to the East India Company (Bayly, 1983).

⁹ Because Wallerstein's focus is on the development of a capitalist world-system, he also says that the peripheral states have "characteristically been central to the processes of unequal exchange and the creation of a proletariat which have been at the heart of the processes of capitalist development."

In terms of state formation, colonialism has been described as a period of social transformation in the existing state structure, or more appropriately in the case of India under British colonial rule, the underlining of the hierarchies of the structured relations of the Indian society through processes of categorization and documentation that made ever more salient the divisions within the different segments of the Indian society. A state system applicable to Indian society and culture already existed, and the transformations brought about to it were the influence of systems of state and governance, as they existed in other parts of the world (see Dirks [1996] and Cohn [1996]).

In describing Cohn's work on colonialism in India, Dirks (1996) says: "the historical anthropology of the colonial state must not be separated from the historical anthropology of the modern state in general. The colonial state is seen as a theater for state experimentation, where historiography, documentation, certification, and representation were all state modalities that transformed knowledge into power." For Cohn, colonialism can be best understood in regards to the production of knowledge that can be utilized as a form of power held by the colonial rulers over the colonized. The forms of knowledge thus generated in the colonial state were also transported back to the imperial state, as modern developments were occurring in both places simultaneously, with different degrees of progress based on the pre-existing conditions in the two kinds of societies. The historical anthropology of colonial society would be an ethnosociological project requiring a detailed discussion of the role of colonial institutions in bringing about the transformation of state and society in colonial India, and as such is beyond the purview of this paper.

Nationalism and Governance in the British Colonial State

Instead of taking the revolt of 1857, referred to as a ‘mutiny’ to the colonial rulers or as the ‘first war of independence’ to the Indian nationalists, as a single event leading to the formation of a modern state in India, the focus needs to be on a series of long-term transformations that had been occurring in the country in tandem with similar occurrences taking place in different parts of the world (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2007). The modern state, as it existed in other parts of the world, did not happen in Europe and was then transported to its various colonies. The establishment of the rule of the East India Company had been a culmination of unstable conditions present in India towards the end of the declining Mughal power that had not received any support from the important groups of people in India. It was these prevailing conditions that the British had taken advantage of to establish their colonial rule (Bayly, 1983). And the expansion and settlement of British rule in India was in a large part dependent upon the compliance of Indian rulers, traders and administrators.

Colonial rule, therefore, was a result of both the events and interests of the Indian people as much as it was a result of the driving forces of industrialization and national conflict in Europe itself. As Robinson (1973) has said of the process of imperialism: “The central mechanisms of imperialism may be found in the systems of collaboration set up in preindustrial societies which succeeded, or failed, in meshing the incoming processes of European expansion into indigenous social politics and evolving a balance between the two.”

Elaborating on the dialectical relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, in this case Europe and India, in the development of a modern state, Metcalf and Metcalf (2007) have said:

Modern technological changes, among them canals, railways, and telegraph, were introduced into India within years of their introduction in Europe. Changes essential to the modern state, including the unification of sovereignty, the surveying and policing of the population, and institutions meant to create a educated citizenry were also, broadly speaking, introduced during the same period in India and in parts of Europe. Indeed, certain modern practices and institutions were either stimulated by the Indian experience or originated in India itself. Municipal cemeteries appeared in India before they did in Europe; the same is true of English literature as a curricular subject, and of state-sponsored scientific and surveying institutions. The colonial relationship with India was essential, moreover, to one of the fundamental characteristics of modern states, namely the practice of state secularism. At the same time, new religious organizations in both India and Britain shared the common pattern of an unprecedented involvement of the laity. In both countries too, the spread of electoral politics was accompanied by debate over the place of religion in public life. Above all, the economic lives of both countries were profoundly, and increasingly, intertwined.

The transportation, and experimentation, of technological products from Europe to India though facilitated the spread of capitalistic tendencies in India, a condition that is more obvious in the contemporary Indian state, it also led to the regional categorization of India as a third world¹⁰ nation. Such categorization, into first and third worlds, according to Lefebvre (1991), is “premised on a distinction between areas where capitalism develops, promoting new technologies and products, and regions where it expands, controlling labor, markets and nature.”

A major dimension of the formation of a modern state in India under the colonial rule was the push for a unified sovereignty, which mainly meant the curtailing of princely sovereignty, scattered across the geographical territory of the country in the various and more-or-less independently functioning princely states. As had occurred in Europe and the Americas, the system of state governance strived to produce “cultural homogenization, authorized histories, unified languages and

¹⁰ The term “developing countries,” instead of “third world countries” is more commonly used nowadays.

educational systems, and shared symbols of authority” (Hansen, 1999). From the point of view of James Ramsey, Marquis of Dalhousie, who served as the governor-general of British India from 1848 to 1856, “the modern state would not tolerate the nested sovereignties and fluid boundaries characteristic of earlier regimes” (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2007).

The main reason behind this endeavor of unified sovereignty on the part of the British, however, was to ensure security and financial resources for the British in the name of such changes being introduced in the country with the “best interests” of those ruled over in mind. The development of a centralized authority in the form of a sovereign state tended to push the traditional systems of governance towards the periphery, and from this point onwards, the dynamics of the center-periphery relations, within the purview of state and governance, become a question of interest. In the case of India, it led to the formation of a sensibility that can be described as “subaltern modernity” (Coronil, 1997).

By focusing on the central authority of the British as the highest centers of political power and the creators of modern statehood in India, one runs the risk of focusing primarily on a top-down history, where “the top” is situated within a complex ensemble of relations, which in such a focus can only be seen from the margins (Coronil 1997). In the case of India, as has already been mentioned, a modern state, not necessarily in the Western conception, had been in operation in the country for a long time and had undergone a series of transformations in the history of occurrences within the geographical boundaries of the country as well as outside of it. The attempt of the British toward a unified sovereignty caused a kind of subjugation of the system of state and governance in the princely states dating back to the pre-

colonial period, transforming them into “subalterns” in their own national territory under the British colonial rule.

Focusing on the history of state formation from the commanding heights of the British-constructed state tends to overlook and overshadow the sensibilities of the lives and form of knowledge of the subaltern subjects. This would be an inaccurate conceptualization of the history of modern state formation in India based on the need of the British for aid and compliance from various Indian “subjects” for the establishment of any kind of centralized systematic organization, and, more importantly, on the amount of exchange that occurred between India and Europe in a process of mutual development for both the nations, as has been described by Metcalf and Metcalf (2007). For these reasons, the process of state formations, or rather state transformation, needs to be located within a global project of modernity (Coronil, 1997).

The first few imports into India from the West during the British regime were the new technologies of that era that were transforming the West. In India, these began with the introduction of systems of railways, postal and telegraph services, and irrigation canal systems (for the modernization of the agricultural sector). The main purpose was the cultural, political and economic integration that would take place within the country, as well as facilitate interaction, transfer and exchange between the colony and the metropole (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2007). The railway system, for example brought the Bengali youth into contact with their other Hindu and Muslim counterparts in the Indian hinterland. The postal and telegraph services facilitated communication between the different groups of Indian nationalists spread across the

country, and proved an asset in unifying the masses in their common cause of the ouster of British colonial rule during the freedom movement.

The revolt of 1857 was the first full-blown and large-scale expression on the part of the Indian subjects of their realization of the need for questioning the British presence in India. Though Dalhousie had laid the legal underpinnings of a unified state with definite boundaries, so that the colonial state could impinge and impose on their Indian subjects, the modern technological systems established in the country facilitated the unification of the periphery groups in making their position more salient in the British-established system of governance, which eventually led to the establishment of *Swaraj*. And this process, for the attainment of self-rule that began in 1857, did not reverse or reject the technological infrastructure that had been established by the British colonial rule. Instead, it built upon it, especially after 1947 in the formation of a post-independence modern nation-state (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2007).

“There were manifold political as well as economic reasons that the revolt (of 1857) became such a monumental marker in India’s colonial history, a moment when Hindus and Muslims, Marathas and Mughals, legendary heroes and yeomen farmers united with countless other unlikely ‘conspirators’ to challenge British rule and uphold the legitimate claim of the Delhi emperor. Nevertheless the British characterized the revolt for the most part as an expression of Indian fanaticism and superstition, as colonial narratives explained ‘heinous massacre of Cawnpore (Kanpur)’ and the ‘barbaric siege of Lucknow’ (Dirks, 2006). The resultant effect on the British of the 1857 Mutiny was “a cleansing sense of heroism and self-assertion, a confirmation of moral superiority and the right to rule.”

The British, henceforth, began to separate themselves from the Indian society to order and control it, and a number of administrative and political institutions were set up for this purpose. One major act was the enactment of the Hindu and Muslim codes into law in the 1860s, which established the two religious communities into separate categories, thereby rigidifying the differences between them at the societal level, without necessarily affecting the state functioning in the hands of the British administrators. The promotion of sentiments and identities based on religious affiliations was expressed in the Khilafat Movement, when a group of Muslims joined together to show their support for the Caliph in Turkey¹¹. Once the events of the Khilafat Movement petered out, the same Muslim group eventually formed the Muslim League, which demanded for a separate state for Muslims towards the end of the freedom movement that led to the division of the country and the creation of Pakistan. The identification of Indian Muslims with Muslims overseas may have been highlighted and propagated by insistence of the British rulers on the participation of Indians all over the country in a larger Hindu culture, considered to be the traditional culture of pre-colonial India, before the Mughal conquests. Though this may have been true of the period prior to the Mughal dynasty, it did not hold completely true during the time of the British rule because of the diversification and intermingling of different religions and races, to the extent that pure ethnicity was difficult to locate within the landscape of the country.

The purpose behind the categorization of people had been to gain a balanced representation of the two communities in the colonial institutions, causing a lumping together of diverse elements that comprised the Indian Hindus and the Indian

¹¹ The Khilafat Movement took place between the years 1919 and 1924 for the protection of the Ottoman Empire after the end of World War I.

Muslims, and being further categorized as ‘majority’ and ‘minority.’ Furthermore, the approach taken by the British establishment for the inculcation of Indians into the administration system required them to develop universal loyalties, while at the same time the different groups were provided with incentives to identify with their particular religions and castes. The attempt to uphold India’s cultural and traditional societal norms appeared to have worked to the advantage of the British in their establishment of a state where the central authority existed in the hands of the British colonial government, while allowing them to maintain order and control over their subjects and counterparts at the same time.

Alongside, Indian nationalist discourse that was constructed upon the idea of a “new imagined national community” and was composed of a certain amount of ambiguity and painful relation with what were perceived as the epitomes of the western world – institutional order, reason, science, and cultural self-assertion. For the Indian nationalists struggling to find a way to reconcile their ambiguity, the concept of the nation was “that abstract and highly mobile sign that could enable the emerging native forms of modernity to become both truly modern and, at the same time, deeply authentic and unique” (Hansen, 1999).

The state in colonial India could not function solely by British administrative officials; the involvement of Indian officials was required. Since the center for the governance of the state was located in Britain and was following the model of, what has been termed, “liberal imperialism,” the selection of Indian administrators needed to be preceded by their training in that particular system of governance. Attempts were made to convert the Municipal Boards set up by the British administration, for various purposes, into schools for political education (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2007).

The first set of three universities (private colleges for English education) were set up in the year 1857, a product of Sir Charles Wood's Education Dispatch of 1854. The early cohort were representatives of the old professional elites, who used their English education to garner administrative positions, and also used the English language to forge political ties and movements with Indians across the country, an endeavor that helped unite Indians from different regions of the country towards the common purpose of the ouster of the colonial rule. English education also gave them an understanding of liberal politics as it was practiced in the West, which not only provided the grounds for debate on Indian notions of 'traditionality,' but also equipped the educated Indians to argue the British system of governance that had been erected in the country, especially by those Indians that got elected to political positions once electoral politics was introduced in the country.

However, complete adoption of the values of liberal discourse could not be at the expense of the vast amount of rich Indian literature that was already present in India, and continued to be generated during those times. The contributions of Rabindranath Tagore are especially noteworthy in this sphere.

Nationalism and State Politics in Colonial India

A blind reverence for the past is bad and so also is a contempt for it, for no future can be founded on either of these. Nationalism is essentially a group memory of past achievements, traditions and experiences.

Jawaharlal Nehru, 1946.

The political education being imparted in the universities, to prepare Indians for participation in the functioning of the Indian State, was however limited to the

elites who could afford to attend the institutions established for this purpose, and for the nationalist movement to gain momentum, knowledge of such kind had to reach the masses. But the practical reality of day-to-day living of the Indian non-elites, trapped in the structure of the societal and cultural constitution of Indian society, did not make them particularly responsive to such kind of progressive thought. At the level of the general Indian masses, of whom agricultural laborers were a huge part, a system of factional¹² networks operated, which was an attempt to encompass the entire nation, by linking the peasant masses to their rulers. Paul Brass has explained the political theory behind the existence of the Indian ‘Faction,’ which continued to exist in the politics of the Congress post-independence in the state of Uttar Pradesh, considered to be the strongest foothold of the Congress political party: “factional loyalties provide the link between the parochial units of Indian society – family, village, caste – and the political parties.

Factional loyalty is an intermediate, perhaps a transitional, form of politics. It is something ‘more’ than parochial politics – a politics based on language, caste, tribe, or religion – and something less than party politics in the European and American sense, involving an impersonal allegiance to a party as an institution or as an ideology.” So according to the theory of political factions in existence in colonial India, the cosmopolitan faction leaders mobilized the support of the local rural elites, who were faction leaders in their own localities and were able to mobilize their clients, mainly the peasants (S.N. Mukerjee, 1970). David Washbrook (1975, 1976) further developed the argument of the formation of political factions by how the local-level factions became linked to provincial-level factions, thereby cutting across caste

¹² Factions, it is believed, link the lowest in the land to the highest.

and class, which highlights the formation of a political system of governance at the individual state level. The politics at the district and provincial level in the modern Indian state came to be characterized by conflicts along factional lines, brought about to a large extent by the constitutional reforms¹³ in state governance that were introduced by the British.

David Hardiman (1982), however, rejects this theory of the structuring of the Indian political faction based on his study of the Patidars, where he found the Patidhar peasants (as opposed to the Patidar landlords, the local rural elites) as exhibiting a kind of agency that can classify the Patidar peasants as a class by themselves. Among the Patidars, Hardiman discovered a strong form of subaltern organization that was not based on vertical patron-client networks and subject to the machinations of manipulative elites, and it was this kind of solidarity that to Hardiman suggested class solidarity.

Asok Sen (1987), however, who sees the historical processes of colonial India as marked by a mixture of pre-capitalist and capitalist relations, does not think that the grouping of the different segments of the Indian society into distinct class categories clearly enunciates the processes of colonial relations¹⁴. The hallmark of Marx's 'class for itself' is the phenomenon of collective consciousness, based on common and shared interests, that gets played out in the form of a political struggle aimed at bringing about social transformation. But, as Sen (1987) points out, "if one wishes to understand the concrete processes of history one cannot afford to use mechanically

¹³ The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919.

¹⁴ Sen (1987) believes in applying categories to historical processes, rather than looking at the historical relations between different class categories – "It is not the categorical rigidity of concepts that is important; rather we must judge the value of these concepts by exploring the possible uses to which they can be put in explanations."

one of the fundamental categories of Marxist theory.” And in the ‘Eighteenth Brumaire,’ Marx provides us with classic examples where, historically, the mere social being of classes is split from the conditions necessary for the generation of class consciousness.

In the French case, Marx describes a pre-industrial multitude of working peasants, scattered and localized in their modes of living, much too diverse in their insularity to be capable of any progressive common action on the national scale. The experience was reversed in the revolution of 1848. Afraid of the revolution’s incipient socialist tendencies, the aristocracy of finance stuck to its own narrow interests. The French bourgeoisie was found in a state of political atrophy. Nor was the proletariat mature enough to be radically conscious of its class tasks. The historical transformation of completing the bourgeoisie-democratic transformation was arrested. Louis Napoleon’s presidential victory had the ominous probability of bringing up a military autocracy. The insularity of the peasantry contributed to the same impasse.

In the case of colonial India, Sen (1987) describes the dominant classes as having no feeling of community, or national bond, to bring about an overhaul of the prevailing social system. He charts the career of the dominant classes, in control of wealth and resources, as “an amalgam of loyalty and opposition to foreign rule,” and such ambiguity on the part of the elite leadership prevented them from identifying themselves with the mind and energy of the subaltern masses at the level of grassroots revolt. The latter operated in an autonomous domain of subaltern movements and their consciousness, where they had their own system of organization and unification. There was a distance, therefore, between the dominant political elites at the center along with the British colonial administrators, and the subalterns who constituted a sort of organization, in a number of different groups, operating towards the periphery. Such a pattern of governance can be seen in present day Indian politics as well, in the dynamics of the center-state relations.

Nationalism and Organization

The Western model of political modernization involves mass participation, in the form of participatory democracies, whether following liberal or socialist ideas. When applying such Western models to emerging and developing non-Western nations, the creation of a program of modernity to which emerging people might “rally their loyalties and ambitions” is not enough. Westernization is only a part of modernization, and for Western aid to be effective, there is a need for “modern-minded administrators” to implement the “modern program,” to create a “desire for ‘substance’ instead of a yearning for ‘appearances and forms’” (Khare, 1966).

Western models of political modernization, considered to (naively) signify political sophistication by most Western governments (Sinai, 1964), can only function in developing nations if adapted to socio-political and societal conditions of the nations they are being applied to. When the spirit of nationalism is running high, there is a tendency of complete rejection of western notions of modernization, in an attempt to preserve the authenticity of the nation. However, as Khare (1966) also says, “the conflict should not be over the source of modernizing ideas, but over their usefulness and applicability to a given socio-political environment.” So despite the virtues of the Western model of democracy, the ideas of constitutional and representative government may be slow to uptake in new and emerging nations, keeping in mind the historical experiences of the emerging nations in respect to their process of development and change.

During the freedom movement in India, even though various mass mobilization movements had taken place, often times uncoordinated and scattered violent events challenging the authority of the British administration, the shaping of

the direction of the freedom struggle and the subsequent formation of the newly-independent Indian nation had been in the hands of the organized community or group of political “elites.”¹⁵ These political elites were well-versed in the history of the nation’s past, had had the opportunity of being exposed to Western as well as other non-Indian systems of thought, and thus were able to work closely with the colonial administration, often times inciting the ire of the masses who were fighting the suppression of the colonial rule in their own terms and via their own methods.

Moving along, modernization can be expressed in several ways: as a “total process of the historical evolution of institutions that are adapted to the rapidly changing functions that reflect the unprecedented increase in man’s knowledge, permitting control over his environment” (Black, 1966). In this respect, the extensive adaptation and change that occurs in all human relationships includes the necessary element of social mobilization. Karl Deutsch (1961) defines the latter as “. . . the process in which major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded and broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behavior. . . [There are] two distinct stages of the process: (1) the stage of uprooting or breaking away from old settings, habits and commitments; and (2) the induction of the mobilized persons into some relatively new patterns of group membership, organization and commitment.”

¹⁵ Referred to as “elites” owing to their education and knowledge of various Western models of governance, providing them with the tools of implementing a model of governance that was able to take ideas from Western notions of democratic rule and adapting them to India’s socio-cultural and political historical existence, especially when it came to drafting the constitution of the country that laid down the framework for the governance of the country. The affinity of those who comprised the political elite of the country in those times should not be taken as a sign of lack of any nationalistic feelings, which were in abundance and which brought these people to the forefront of the freedom movement in the first place.

In the case of India, because the country is a relatively recent nation, the complete breaking away from “old settings, habits and commitments” has not taken place, in an effort to preserve the traditional aspect of Indian culture. In contemporary Indian politics, the Hindu nationalism espoused by the BJP as signifying the essence of India as best expressed by Hinduism, is an example of the effort to create a conception of the Indian nation based on religious identities and affiliations. It is true that India in its pre-colonial phase was a primarily Hindu culture (as has been discussed in this paper), however the political nationalistic Hindutva espoused by political parties in present-day India is a far cry from the philosophy and cultural practices of Hinduism as they were practiced in those times.

According to Khare (1966), most nations with a past history of colonial rule tend to consider Western institutions and structure as an asset in their attempts to modernize their societies, while at the same time maintaining their traditional roots. Such would be the ideology of a developing nation. Despite arguments that the nature of modernization is mainly determined by political factors, it would be more accurate to say that modernization encompasses all aspects of a social system (Khare, 1966). For nations with a structured culture, such as India, the structural component of the modernization process would take place in the spheres of the social, the economic and the political. The sustained growth of the total system would depend upon the political structures with the responsibility for the governance of the nation. Elaborating of this aspect of political development, Eisenstadt (1964) says:

Firstly, there is the development of a highly differentiated political structure in terms of specific political roles and institutions, of the centralization of the polity and of development of specific political goals and orientations. Secondly, political modernization is characterized by the growing extension of the scope of the central,

legal, administrative and political activities and their permeation into all spheres and regions of the society. Thirdly, it is characterized by the continuous spread of potential power to wider groups in the society – ultimately to all adult citizens.

A major component of the process of political modernization in state functioning is the accountability of the elites in power to the rest of the public. Demands for plans of action on the part of the masses is also required, and is an indication of political participation on their part, necessary for the functioning of a system of governance. As Khare (1966) points out, several developing societies have witnessed the widening of the political process through mass organizations, challenging their earlier features of acquiescing to traditional-parochial systems of authority. Such rapid mobilization of the public is not only increasing political participation, but is also introducing new elements into the political arena of state governance. Discussed below is the organization of the Indian peasantry during the freedom movement in colonial India as an example of the demand of political participation.

The role of the peasantry in the anti-colonial struggle in India cannot be fully understood either from the point of view of the “competitive factional interests” of the Indian elites, or from the efforts of the Indian National Congress to “arouse an all-embracing nationalist consciousness among the entire people.” As ParthaChatterjee (2000) points out, a “structure of duality” in the nationalist mass movement appears to have occurred due to the coming together of two political domains. First, political parties and associations formally organized under the colonial rule seeking to replace the “colonial state by the bourgeois nation-state”. Second, the domain of peasant politics, separate from the interests of the bourgeois group. The former belongs to the category of neo-colonial historiography of the Indian nationalist movement in which,

according to Ranajit Guha (1999), Indian nationalism has been represented “as the sum of the activities and ideas by which the Indian elite¹⁶ responded to the institutions, opportunities, resources, etc. generated by colonialism.”

The Indian National Congress was a symbol of the “great tradition” of the Indian freedom movement, viewed as a representation of “all of the people,” speaking on their behalf as well as organizing and leading all the political movements associated with the nationalist/freedom movement. They were, however, a representation of bourgeois political ambition and ideology, and historical records provide several instances where instead of leading movements of subordinate resistance, Indian National Congress activists diverted movements that were generated outside and independently of it.

Especially seen in contrast to the activities of the revolutionaries (the Indian peasantry, the Indian army, etc.), the Indian National Congress many times worked in consolidation with the British colonial government. An example is during the outbreak of the imperialist world war (WW1), the Indian National Congress expressed its loyalty to the British in all the sessions that were held during that time. In 1918, at the close of WW1, the Congress passed a resolution expressing its loyalty to the British crown and congratulated them on the successful termination of the war. These expressive measures came at the same time that the Indian peasantry, as well as the

¹⁶ “The term ‘elite’ has been used to signify *dominant* groups, foreign as well as indigenous. The *dominant foreign* groups included all the non-Indian, that is, mainly British officials of the colonial state and foreign industrialists, merchants, financiers, planters, landlords and missionaries. The *dominant indigenous* groups included classes and interests operating at two levels. At the *all-India level* they included the biggest feudal magnates, the most important representatives of the industrial and mercantile bourgeois and native recruits to the uppermost levels of the bureaucracy. At the *regional and local levels* they represented such classes and other elements as were *either* members of the dominant all-India groups included in the previous category *or* if belonging to social strata hierarchically inferior to those of the dominant all-India groups still *acted in the interests of the latter and not in conformity to interests corresponding truly to their own social being*” (Guha, 2000).

Indian army, were staging revolts against the British, many times with the help of Indians stationed outside of the country¹⁷, in the hopes of liberation from the colonial power while the British were embroiled in the imperialist war abroad.

The involvement of members of the Indian National Congress in government and administration decisions (hard-won on their part), such as in the review of the partition of Bengal and the revoking of the Punjab Colonization Act among others, signified the emergence of the bourgeois political class onto the national scene. And as Harkishan Singh Surjeet (1986), the founder of the Communist Party in India, concedes, “it was providing leadership to the movement and was able to get concessions.” The Indian National Congress on their part recognized that cooperation from the Indian peasantry was required for this leadership to be effective: “The revolutionary movement in the colonial countries would achieve no success unless it gets the support of the peasant masses,” the Indian National Congress emphasized in one of its sessions.

In terms of the agrarian question and the situation of the peasantry in colonial countries, the Indian National Congress concluded that:

Only the agrarian revolution aiming at the expropriation of large land owners can rouse the vast peasant masses destined to have a decisive influence in the struggle against imperialism. The fear of agrarian watchwords on the part of the bourgeois nationalists is evidence of the close ties existing between the native bourgeois and the large feudal and feudal bourgeois landowners and their ideological political dependence on the latter. The hesitation and wavering of this class must be used by the revolutionary elements for systematic criticism and exposure of the lack of resolution of the bourgeois leaders of the

¹⁷ An example: “The outbreak of the imperialist world war in 1914 raised hopes among the people for the liberation of all colonial peoples, and Indian revolutionaries abroad, who were mostly peasants, took the initiative to organize a revolt in the Indian army. They formed the Gadhar Party with headquarters in San Francisco. They raised the slogan of complete independence and sent hundreds of revolutionaries to India to organize a revolt against the British” (Surjeet, 1986).

national movement. It is precisely this lack of resolutions that hinders the organization of the toiling masses as is proved by the bankruptcy of the tactics of non-cooperation in India.

In order that the Indian masses may be drawn into active participation in the struggle for national liberation, it is necessary to proclaim the radical reform of the bourgeois national parties to the greatest extent, possible to adopt this revolutionary agrarian program. (Documents of the History of the C.I.)

Despite such statements, instances of the suppression of actions by the peasantry, independent of the Indian National Congress dominated by Mahatma Gandhi, do exist. The incident at Chauri-Chaura is such an example, where in addition to being peasant revolt, it also is an example of the betrayal of the Indian peasantry by its national bourgeois leadership. In 1922, Mahatma Gandhi launched a massive civil disobedience movement in a village in Bardoli, in the Surat district of the state of Gujarat. Providing encouragement to the rest of the country, it led to a violent uprising of angry peasants in the Chauri-Chaura district in Uttar Pradesh.

The actions taken by the peasantry, though violent in nature, made a significant impact on both the British regime as well as the Indian National Congress. They brought forth a sense of fear and related opposition to the agrarian movement by both parties. The Indian National Congress, on their part, appears to be ambiguous in their view of and engagement with the Indian peasantry: On the one hand, they realized the importance of the involvement of the peasantry in the struggle for independence for putting adequate pressure on the British regime, but on the other hand, they did not want the peasantry to emerge as a class aware of its own rights, determined to end the rule and exploitation of the landlords.

The peasant organizations that had been appearing in several states around this time realized the need of uniting and organizing themselves as a class, separate from

the Indian National Congress, to address their triple domination under imperialist landlords, moneylenders and traders. It was also around the same time that the ideas of Socialism were becoming popular. The Leftist elements in the Indian National Congress, disillusioned with Gandhi, formed their own Congress Socialist Party. They, in turn, realized that the only way to bring the vast masses of the peasant population into the fold of the independence movement was by taking up the anti-feudal struggle as well as the immediate demands of the peasantry. Having come to the conclusion that “the struggle for real political freedom could not be separated from the struggle of the peasantry for an end to landlordism and for the radical restructuring of rural society,” the necessity of organizing the Indian peasants into a class was realized. This project was taken up by Left Congressmen, Socialists, and Communists (though the Communist Party had been banned in 1934, it still continued to exercise an influence over the working peasantry), all of whom were already trying to develop “independent class organizations of the working class peasants and other sections of the toiling people.” The thus formed All-India Kisan Sabha held its first session in Lucknow in 1936, at the same time the Indian National Congress was holding its session in the same city. “The idea was to project the kisan (peasant) movement as a part of the national movement, though maintaining its separate identity as a class organization.”

Some quotes from the main resolution of the first session:

The objective of the kisan movement is to secure complete freedom from economic exploitation and the achievement of full economic and political power for the peasants and workers and all the other exploited classes.

The main task of the kisan movement shall be the organization of the peasants to fight for their immediate political and economic demands

in order to prepare them for their emancipation from every form of exploitation.

The kisan movement stands for the achievements of ultimate economic and political power for the producing masses through its active participation in the national struggle for winning complete independence.

The simple and direct points made in their very first resolution prove that the Indian peasantry was not, as the colonial mind thought of them, “ignorant, exploited by landowners, traders and moneylenders, respectful of authority, grateful for those in power who cared for and protected them, but also volatile in temperament, superstitious and often fanatical, easily aroused by agitators and troublemakers from among the Indian elite who wanted to use them for their narrow political designs” (Chatterjee, 2000). Instead, they were a group in full awareness of their subjective consciousness and three-pronged exploitation, their subordinate position in colonial India as well as in the Indian nationalist movement, and were able to organize themselves into an independent organization, fighting for their own rights along with the right for India’s independence from the colonial rule.

The Globalizing Effects of Colonialism

Colonial rule was a time of immense amounts of transmission and exchange of culture, in a variety of forms, between the world of the colonizers and the world of the colonized, as well as the movement of people across different regional spaces. In such a viewpoint, space cannot be perceived as a static entity composed of structural determinants, devoid of any political activity (Laclau, 1990). Space is to be conceived of as a fluid category that is constantly created and recreated through the movement of people, or material resources, over a course of time. Space is constituted of the social relations that are enacted within it, a “moment in the intersection of configured social

relations” (Massey, 1992). Even in cultures that are composed of an inherent social structure, as in the case of India, the social relations between the various elements, placed at different levels, and the situational and time-dependent diversity in the configurations of their interrelationships and interactions, are constantly produced and reproduced (Gregory and Ury, 1985).

During colonial rule, the movement of Indians out of India took place in several forms; the transportation of human labor to various colonies of the British Empire, the stationing of Indian soldiers in other colonies, those of the Indian elite who availed of the opportunity of traveling and getting educated abroad. The notion of territoriality, therefore, was not limited to the land that fell under the geographical boundaries that India was composed of. Menon (2010) has described peasantization as the fixing of the people on the land, especially during colonial rule, as an attempt to incarcerate the people within a system of revenues, in the interest of increasing productivity of goods that could then be transported to Britain and its colonies, as well as within India, to maintain a system of law and order that would allow the colonizers to better control and govern the people. The setting up of the several institutions under the British rule, though contributed to an organized system of administrative governance, also led to the institutionalization of people. And the implications of institutionalizing institutions are different under conditions of colonization, opposed to a similar model of state governance in a decolonized and independent nation-state.

The institutional incarceration tended to confine Indians within their traditions, and the movement of people across geographically-set boundaries was described as an act of criminality (Menon, 2010). Such mapping of the Indian territory, which was an

object of colonial creation¹⁸, was later inherited by the Indian nationals as representing the true spirit of nationalism. Such a conception of nationalism had been opposed by several thinkers of those times, one of them being Rabindranath Tagore. The concept of “Mother India,” i.e. the land and soil of India, became an object of worship, and the Indian peasant, seen as the symbol of the continuity between the past and the present, and the Indian villages were romanticized as representing the imaginary of the map, of Mother India. Under the contemporary conditions of modern Indian statehood and its global relations, the concept of Mother India weighs heavily on the uncolonized mind as the question of who’s vested interests did it actually represent (Menon, 2010).

The territorialization of the land led to the image of the peasant as one who acts but does not think, and has been studied extensively by a group of scholars called the Subaltern Studies Collective. According to Menon (2010), territory is not a bounded region representing a “pure” cultural space. Territory is generated by people as a result of their movement, in the form of movement of labor, capital, spreading of religion, or migration. By such movement, territories and spaces are generated, and also leads to the creation of, according to Menon (2010), of “multiple territorialities, and multiple times,” and of the “para-colonial,” i.e. representing alongside the colonial. The multiple times were embodied in the imaginations of the Indian people chiming with imaginations outside of the colonial space and territory, and some of the best examples and representations of such para-coloniality are to be found in the literary works produced in those times. They are also a representation of the

¹⁸ Country-wide surveys, of India, were initiated by British officials.

cosmopolitanism of some of the Indian thinkers of those times, and a discussion of Tagore, in a section of this paper, will be in that context.

In present-day political discourse, the articulation of nationalism does not necessarily need to be limited to direct references of territory, people and history that a particular nationalism it is representing. However, discourse that does not use such conceptual terminologies, which serve the purpose of providing some measure of stability, runs the risk of not possessing adequate political mass appeal for it to be a part of discursive formations in the public arena (Hansen, 1999). And even if it was able to move beyond those conceptual categories, the notion of territory and people would be inferred from the utilization of the term “nation,” such is the necessity of stable and bounded identification in all kinds of discursive trends. I shall now move on to a discussion of Rabindranath Tagore and his conception of what the education of the Indian people during colonial times entail that would prepare them to be a part of a globalized world-system and culture in the future, and his perception of Indians, the products of colonial rule, as being cosmopolitan nationalists, during colonial rule as well as after independence had been achieved.

Rabindranath Tagore: The Cosmopolitan Indian during British Colonialism

All the convergent influences of the world run through this society: Hindu, Moslem, Christian, secular; Stalinist, liberal, Maoist, democratic socialist, Gandhian. There is not a thought that is being thought in the West and east that is not active in some Indian mind.

E.P. Thompson.

Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin. I am proud of my humanity when I can acknowledge my poets and

artists of other countries as my own. Let me feel with unalloyed gladness that all the great glories of man are mine. Therefore it hurts me deeply when the cry of rejection rings loud against the West in my country with the clamor that Western education can only injure us. Rabindranath Tagore.

Tagore is known as the maker of the modern Indian mind and the champion of the 'One World' approach. He grew up in a household that had adopted several foreign customs, but his father also had a tremendous love for his country. Tagore, therefore, grew up with a dual perspective that allowed him to be a part of the nationalist movement and write illuminating critiques of it at the same time. An internationalist approach is evident in several of his writings and public addresses. Although the nationalist fervor and disillusionment with the British government was at its zenith, Tagore mentions in his last public address, delivered on April 14, 1914 and titled 'Crisis in Civilization,' that the leaders of the nationalist movement had not lost faith in the generosity of the English and hoped that "the victor would of his own grace pave the path of freedom for the vanquished," although he also mentions that the "spirit of abject dependence upon the charity of our rulers was no matter for pride."

Tagore's optimistic view and affinity for the British was largely due to the British literary material he had been exposed to in his life that had been transported to India along with the British during their rule in India. He mentions in his address that "in those days, the type of learning that was served out to us was neither plentiful nor diverse, nor was the spirit of scientific enquiry very much in evidence," and English language and literature had provided nourishment to the minds of the people in India who were fortunate enough to have access to them. In Tagore's case, he belonged to

the privileged cultured and educated section of Bengal, but he was aware of the necessity of the education of the masses. He suggested that the educated Indian students take it upon themselves to share their knowledge with those of the Indian people who were unable to be a part of the school system. His ideas relating to what education in India entails, however, were different. The method of learning and imparting education that he established at his school in Santiniketan¹⁹ in West Bengal is a reflection of his proposed system of education for the Indian people.

Tagore was dissatisfied with the quality of education existing in Indian schools during the British Raj. He felt that education was too mechanical, did not bear any direct relation with the world existing outside of the classroom because it did not lay emphasis on a proper knowledge of history, science and literature, and especially lacked a homogenous pattern. A comprehensive knowledge of the past was a necessary requirement for children growing up in the days when India as a country and a nation was going through a transitory phase, otherwise they would be unable to adequately grasp modern political trends. “History is not only a narration of events, but it is a history of people. The historical truth can be appreciated if there is a perfect blending between present reality and past events.”

During the 19th century under the British Raj, to acquire the job of a clerk, knowledge of English language was considered a necessary requirement. Educated Indians began to imitate the British in all manners and customs of life. In 1823, a Committee of Public Instruction was formed for the purpose of establishing colleges for the study of the English, considered an important medium for the cultivation of

¹⁹ The noted Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray described his schooling at Santiniketan as: “Santiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am.”

European knowledge of sciences and literature, a desire for which had been awakened amongst the Indian class. Thus, on March 7, 1835, Lord William Bentinck declared that: “the great object of the British government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the peoples of India, and that all funds appropriated for the purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone” (Das Gupta, 1993).

Tagore was concerned about the blind fascination for European literature and influence at the expense of the cultural emancipation of his own country. He was of the opinion that “a sufficient knowledge of the genesis and growth of English literature” was required otherwise their appreciation would fail miserably. He was saddened by the subjugation of Bengali literature and the preference for English over Bengali as the medium of instruction in the prevalent education system. But it wasn’t only Bengali literature that was being pushed to the side. The 6th Report of the School Book Society, established in July 1817, stated: “Between January 1834 and December 1835, the Society sold over thirty-one thousand five hundred copies of English books and made a profit of 20 percent on the outlay, while the Education Committee could dispose of only 52 copies of Sanskrit and Arabic books, which was not enough to pay even the expenses of keeping them for two months, to say nothing of the cost of printing.”

The downside of the immense interest and enthusiasm of the Indian people for knowledge generated outside of their own culture and country was that the rulers remained ignorant of the ideals and aspirations of the Indian people, and, more importantly, of the course of evolution that Indian society and culture had gone through over the past centuries of its civilization. And the British rulers never felt the

need to inquire either, especially in the sphere of education where their introduction of the European literature was receiving such popular support (Das Gupta, 1993).

School education was not always possible for all of the people in India, and a large section of the common people were unaware of the happenings in the country along with happenings in other countries. Such lack of knowledge served as a social hindrance towards the development and progress of the people. For the successful functioning of the state, participation from all the state's residents and inhabitants is required, and their active participation would be difficult to achieve unless people are informed about their part in the process of state functioning. The spreading of progressive Western values was hindered if it was only limited to a small segment of people, primarily those who had the opportunity of acquiring a school education. Tagore suggested the spreading of knowledge of history, especially during the nationalist movement, among people unable to attend school by the use of folktales and *yatras*. This was a method that was followed in pre-colonial India, and would continue to be useful, in Tagore's opinion, in educating the general masses, apart from the western-styled school education accessible mostly to privileged groups.

To give an example of a couple of Tagore's literary works that express his nationalist sentiments during the period of British rule and the freedom movement - Tagore's *Totakahini* (parrot's story) is a satirical essay on the education system prevalent in those times. It can also be considered a depiction of the oppression and negligence felt by the common people under the British Raj. Here's a summary as provided by Tapati Das Gupta (1993):

Once there was a parrot who was ignorant. She used to sing, but she did not chant the *Shastras*; she was uncivilized. The king said that this bird was totally useless, she was bringing loss to the royal market by

taking so much forest fruits. The king asked his ministers to give lessons to the bird. The nephews of the king were given this responsibility. There was a lot of discussion among scholars about why the bird was ignorant. They came to the conclusion that education could be accommodated into her small nest. So the foremost task would be to make a grand big cage. The goldsmith immediately got the assignment and the golden cage was ready within a few days. Everyone appreciated the cage; it was novel indeed. Knowledge was now a secondary matter. The goldsmith was rewarded heavily. The scholars were now invited and heaps of manuscripts were written everyday and they were again copied and recopied. A grand preparation went on and everyone concerned got a handful of coins. But there was one critic who reported to the king that no one was actually bothered about the bird. On enquiry, the nephews showed a long list of the well-wishers of the bird – like the goldsmith, scholars, repairers and others. So the king once again relaxed. One day, the king himself wanted to see the bird's study preparation. Everybody welcomed the king and the king was overwhelmed. When he was about to leave, the critic came from behind a bush and asked to see the bird for once. The king had forgotten. So he saw the parrot – he was really pleased. There was no food, no water in the cage; only the pages of the manuscript were heaped inside and the pages were thrust into the mouth of the bird with the edge of a pen. The parrot ceased to sing, she could not even scream a little. The king thought it really fascinating. The critic was severely rebuked. Day by day the bird became weak, she was trying her best to cut open the bars of her cage with her weak beak. The cage was repaired once again and everyone began to speak of the ingratitude of the bird. At last the bird died; the critic spread the news, because no one actually knew when the bird died. The king asked his nephews whether the rumor was true. The nephews said that the bird had completed her education. The king asked whether the bird flew, jumped, sang, or screamed. All the answers were negative. The bird was brought before the king. The bird made no response, only the dry pages of the manuscript made a rustling sound. Out there, the tender leaves of the trees heaved a deep sigh in the fresh breeze of the spring.

Tagore's primary concern was for the progress of his people, achieved by observing the systems of other nations, deriving from their useful aspects and applying them to their own selves and to the governance of the country. The following lines from one of his poems express this idea:

Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high; where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into fragments, by narrow domestic walls.

European education was accessible at home in India, and the system of governance established in the country post-independence was greatly influenced by the European, and particularly the British, systems. There were other nations in the world as well from which inspiration could be derived. He was impressed by Japan's transformation into a mighty and prosperous nation. He was particularly pleased by the Soviet administration's avoidance of religious conflict and pitting of one community against another by means of uneven distribution of political favors, an ill that exists in India until the present day. He talks about the attempt made by USSR to harmonize the interests of the various nationalities scattered all over the region, instead of subjugating the welfare of its people to national greed, an inherent feature of imperialist powers. In India, Tagore said, the British administration had established "with baton in hand, a reign of 'law and order,' in other words a policeman's rule" and he further said that "such a mockery of civilization can claim no respect from us."

He propagated an exchange of knowledge to attain a synthesis of two or more cultures. "He wanted Indians to learn what was going on elsewhere, how others lived, what they valued, and so on, while remaining interested and involved in their own culture and heritage" (Sen, 2007). If Indians were benefitting from Western and other Eastern education and cultures, then India needed to provide them with some gifts of her own as well. For example, Tagore gave an address titled 'Civilization and Progress,' amongst others, on the Indian concept of *dharma* while on a tour in China. Tagore was propagating for cosmopolitanism, rather than the kind of nationalism and patriotism that was opposed to the fluidity of geographical and territorial boundaries. In his view, territorial boundaries could not be drawn, in the case of India, because of the previous history of the country.

Once India gained independence from colonial rule, the possibility of expanding boundaries beyond the national borders was already present because of the remnants of the colonial rule, and their withdrawal had only served the purpose of stretching the national boundaries of the country. The one major difference between the colonizer and the colonized nations in the aftermath of colonial rule can be seen from the perspective of expansion and contraction of national boundaries as they are composed of not so much geographical territory, but of the people who inhabit those territories.

Martha Nussbaum discusses the notion of cosmopolitanism in her review of Tagore's novel *The Home and the World*, which she considers to be a good example of how the politics of nationalism represents, what she calls, "the politics of difference." She discusses Tagore's novel as "a tragic story of the defeat of a reasonable and principled cosmopolitanism by the forces of nationalism and ethnocentrism." Her main concern, like Tagore's, in the politics of nationalism related to education is on how education and political deliberation should be based on shared national values, but at the same time a consideration of general human rights as a practical reality is also important, especially in today's contemporary world where it is the sphere within which "nations interact all the time on terms of justice and mutual respect." Nussbaum takes a historical digression to trace the origins of cosmopolitanism to the ancient Greek Cynic philosopher Diogenes and his statement: "I am a citizen of the world," his answer to the question where he came from, to which he chose to define himself in terms of "universal aspirations and considerations." Quoting from Nussbaum's essay titled "Patriotism and

Cosmopolitanism,” the image of the (community of the) world citizen as developed by the Stoics, the followers of Diogenes:

The local community of our birth, and the community of human argument and aspiration that ‘is truly great and truly common, in which we look neither to this corner nor to that, but measure the boundaries of our nation by the sun’ (Seneca, *De Otio*). It is this community that is, most fundamentally, the source of our moral obligations. With respect to the most basic moral values such as justice, “we should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbors” (Plutarch, *On the Fortunes of Alexander*). We should regard our deliberations as, first and foremost, deliberations about human problems of people in particular human situations, not problems growing out of a national identity that is altogether unlike that of others. The accident of where one is born is just that, an accident; any human being might have been born in any nation. Recognizing this, we should not allow differences of nationality or class or ethnic membership or even gender to erect barriers between us and our fellow human beings. We should recognize humanity wherever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect.

Such was the vision of citizenship that Tagore had in mind for the Indian people, especially after the gaining of national independence, and that Nussbaum recognizes in Tagore’s literary writings, which often reflected his social and political underpinnings. And such a “transhistorical imperative of all dialectical thought” (Jameson, 1981) is evident in several literary of both Indian and British origins, during the colonial period²⁰. In Tagore’s novel, the cosmopolitan landlord who “struggles to stem the tide of nationalism and factionalism by appeals to universal moral norms” can be seen as a representation of Tagore’s political cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum). For the characters in Tagore’s novel, the appeal to cosmopolitan seems to fail because of the nationalistic fervor and passion that was riding high in those days of the nationalistic/freedom movement.

²⁰ Jameson proposes the method he calls “metacommentary” in which the object of study is not so much the text itself, but the interpretations that can be derived from the textual content, which in turn help to appropriate the text. For this purpose, locating the text in its historical milieu is important.

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