Problematizing Democracy

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Declaration

I, Meera Ashar, do hereby declare that this thesis entitled **Problematizing Democracy** contains original research work done by me in fulfillment of the requirements for my Ph.D. degree in Cultural Studies from the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society and that this report has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma in this or any other institution. This work has not been sent anywhere for publication or presentation purpose.

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Certificate

Certified that this thesis entitled **Problematizing Democracy** is a record of

bonafide study and research carried out by Ms. Meera Ashar under my supervision

and guidance. The report has not been submitted by her for any award of degree or

diploma in this or in any other university.

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Contents

It was a matter of analyzing, not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their 'ideologies,' but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed.

Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

Introduction

Problematizing the Political Lexicon

Postcolonial political theory is at a critical juncture. It can neither acknowledge

Western theory for the contribution of concepts and frameworks, nor can it present a

coherent indigenous model for understanding the goings-on of postcolonial political

systems. Theorization of the political process in India has been particularly fraught

with difficulties: borrowed concepts, alien language (soon becoming its own), the

colonial past, a unique tradition compromised by an adulterated modernity. This,

however, has not deterred contemporary Indian theorists. Several explanations have

been proposed to explain the contemporary Indian political process in the last century.

But Indian politics continues to elude theorization.[1]

But why have we not been able to explain adequately our political systems and

institutions? Moreover, why are deliberations of our political life dominated by the

discourse of democracy?[2] This thesis explores these questions by examining the

language of contemporary political theory or the Indian political lexicon. In the course

of our inquiry we will encounter a number of troubling questions that have not been

exhaustively addressed. Why are all kinds of political communities read as nation-

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[1] While this may appear to be a rather forceful claim, it is a concern that has been voiced by most postcolonial theorists. The discrepancy between political experience and ways of understanding it have been explained in different ways by theorists. The first chapter of this thesis attempts to lay out the varying responses to this discrepancy.

[2] The thesis title, *Problematizing Democracy,* owes its meaning to Michel Foucault's use of the concept of *problematization*. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 3 vols., vol. 2, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). In *Fearless Speech*, Foucault explains his use: "problematization…which means: how and why certain things (behaviour, phenomenon, processes) became a problem. Why, for example, certain forms of behaviour were characterized and classified as 'madness' while other similar forms were completely neglected at a given historical moment…" Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 171. The thesis intends to 'problematize' democracy as "an object of concern, an element of reflection, and a material for stylization." Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 23-24.

states? Why is citizenship presented as the only form of membership to a political

community? Why is history presented as the only way in which people relate to their

past or tradition? These questions may seem to be, at one level, merely semantic

quibbles. This thesis however argues that the elusiveness of Indian political

theorization is not simply a problem of terminology or concepts, or even of a cluster

of concepts. That is to say, the difficulty with political theorization in India does not

lie in an inability to consistently employ the concepts currently being used to

represent Indian political institutions. Indeed, we may be able to present a fairly

consistent and correct use of the political/moral vocabulary, however dynamic,

inherited from the Western theory. The difficulty in representing Indian political

institutions may be located in the absence of the conceptual grid that provides

intelligibility to the concepts of Western political theory. This conceptual grid of

intelligibility is not simply the 'vocabulary of politics' or the 'language of morals,' or

'keywords.'[3] It is in fact the particular historical experience that provides us with an

understanding of the language of politics/morals in question. Dismissing the very idea

of an essential (or in his own words, a "relatively stable") language of politics or

keywords, Quentin Skinner has called for a "historically-minded acknowledgement

that different societies may conceptualize these domains in different and possibly

even incommensurable ways."[4] Being both a political theorist and a historian of ideas,

Skinner, more than any other contemporary theorist, has been alert to the serious

methodological and theoretical issues raised by the epistemologically difficult

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[3] Quentin Skinner in his essay titled "Retrospect: Studying Rhetoric and Conceptual Change" in *Regarding Method*, vol. 1, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), dismisses the very idea of an essential (or in his own words, a "relatively stable") language of politics or keywords in favour of a more "historically-minded acknowledgement that different societies may conceptualise these domains in different and possibly even incommensurable ways" (175-176).

[4] Quentin Skinner, *Regarding Method*, vol. 1, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175-176.

problem of studying the relationship between, to use his own terms, "conceptual

change" and "political lexicon." Therefore, in order to formulate the problematic of

this thesis, it would be helpful to begin with a discussion of Skinner's approach.

Raising questions about the reach and validity of Skinner's framework through

Foucault's genealogy of the 'Western experience' will then enable us to evolve a

framework to both propose a diagnosis of the failures of Indian political theories and

to theoretically justify our own inquiry.

Words, Concepts and the Representation of Politics

> If the formation of concepts can be explained by the facts of nature,
> should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature
> which is the basis of grammar?—Our interest certainly includes the
> correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature
> (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.)
>
> I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people
> would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). But: if
> anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones,
> and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that
> we realize—then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to
> be different from what we are used to, and the formations of concepts
> different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.[5]
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

The words 'words' and 'concepts' are often used interchangeably. The presence of a

word is understood to entail, without any qualifications or conditions, the existence of

a concept. Thus the widespread use of the terms of Western theorization is ordinarily

and uncritically assumed to imply the possession of particular concepts, irrespective

of whether they are those that were (or are) used by Western theory or have been

translated from an indigenous context or have come into being as the result of a

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[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 161.

historical change in society. But is the relationship between the use of certain words

and the possession of a concept one of direct correspondence? If we accept the

Wittgensteinian proposition that the possession (or formation) of a concept would

provide us some insight into the general facts of nature, or more correctly, the general

facts of nature provide us with the ability to form, understand and use concepts, then

the question for us would be: what are these 'facts of nature'? Or in our case, facts of

culture or facts of historical experience? To be able to conduct a meaningful study of

the use of terms in political theory, it is necessary to start with a methodological

clarification at two levels: the relationship between words and concepts; and the

relationship between 'cultural' or 'historical experience' and a class of concepts that

we will tentatively term as political/moral.

A clarification of the first kind of relationship is attempted by Quentin Skinner[6]

in his methodological critique of Raymond Williams's *Keywords*. Skinner claims that

there is a need for a systematic method by which we can begin to investigate the

relationship between keywords (and their changing meaning) and socio-political

debates. Raymond Williams' book argues that the way in which certain words come

into being and display a change in meaning provides a valuable insight into "matters

of historical and contemporary substance."[7] Williams's suggestion is that a change in

the meaning of a term would reflect a corresponding change in the socio-political

conditions of a society. But Williams does not present any explanation of why only

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[6] Skinner, *Regarding Method*. This chapter has variously been published as "Language and Political Change," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change: Ideas in Context*, ed. Russell Hanson et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Quentin Skinner, "The Idea of a Cultural Lexicon," *Essays in Criticism* XXIX (1979). All references here are from the chapter of the book, *Regarding Method.*

[7] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 158.

certain words (keywords) come to bear the burden of reflecting an understanding of society (that is, how they become what he describes as "strong" or "persuasive" words). Or, as Skinner puts it, there is "no consistent account of how certain words come to 'involve values'…"[8]

Williams does not illustrate how we may register changes in society with the help of these keywords. He reduces all problems of meaning change in keywords as having to do with sense or meaning and focuses on historical developments that resulted in a meaning change. Critiquing this semantic reductionism of Williams, Skinner attempts to establish, primarily, a systematic relationship between words and concepts. Skinner argues that "a claim has often been made that possessing a concept is equivalently a matter of knowing the meaning of a word… to argue for any such equivalence is undoubtedly a mistake."[9] It's a mistake, Skinner argues, because it is perfectly possible for a community to possess a concept even though there may not be a word for it until much later in history.[10] Alternatively, "a whole community of language users may be capable of applying [certain terms] with perfect consistency… yet it might be possible to show that there is simply no concept which answers to any of their agreed uses."[11] Here Skinner gives the example of terms like *being* and *infinity* which, though they are used with a fair amount of mastery and skill,[12] are

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[8] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 161.

[9] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 159.

[10] Skinner gives the example of John Milton's *Paradise Lost.* Milton asserts that he is attempting something new in prose and rhyme; by which Skinner contends he is invoking the concept of 'originality.' The term 'originality,' however, did not appear till a much later historical period. Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 159.

[11] Skinner, *Regarding Method,* 160.

[12] In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein demonstrates that "To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 81e.

conceptually vacuous, or at least possessing such a high degree of generality that one may be led to believe that they indeed do not embody any concept. Skinner elaborates a methodology for studying how the political lexicon registers the larger debates and struggles of the society. Drawing on the accounts of "theorists of language as well as moral philosophers,"[13] Skinner proposes a threefold test—let us call it Skinner's test for ease of reference—to ascertain whether these keywords, or what he calls, "appraisive terms," are "understood and correctly applied."[14] The test involves:

1. An understanding of the criteria for the use of the word or the conditions under which the term may be applied. Thus to understand the meaning of the appraisive term *courageous*, one would need to identify the conditions under which an act can be called courageous. For example, that it should be a voluntary action, performed in the face of danger with an awareness of the consequent danger.

2. Knowledge of the range of references of the word, that is, the circumstances in which the word can be applied to particular situations. The range of reference of a term can be correctly identified only once there is an adequate grasp of the criteria for the use of the term. Thus a community of users of the term courageous may argue about whether an act can really be called courageous or is mere recklessness, fortitude and so on. This does not demonstrate that the meaning of the term courageous is disputed; the users are not arguing about the sense of the term courageous. Those who dispute whether a particular action is courageous or reckless are clearly in agreement about the meaning or the sense of courageous. It is the range of reference of the term

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[13] In a footnote Skinner acknowledges his debt to theorists of language like Wittgenstein, Austin, and Dummett and moral philosophers like Foot, Murdoch and Hampshire.

[14] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 161.

that they are debating. That is to say, in debating whether countering unnecessary

danger is courageous or reckless, the range of reference of both courageous and

reckless is being determined. Both courageous and reckless being what Skinner calls

'appraisive terms,' the range of their reference must be clearly delimited as a

consequence of their meaning. Thus some actions could be called courageous whereas

others would be called reckless, with almost universal agreement. For example, once

it is realized that the act being called courageous was performed with no impelling

danger, the user would be obliged to agree that it was an act of recklessness and not

courage.

3. A grasp of the range of attitudes that the term expresses or the 'speech-acts'

the word can be used to perform. To call something courageous would necessarily

mean attributing a positive value to it or commending it.[15]

A disagreement about the three requirements for a common application of the

appraisive terms could be said to reflect a disagreement about "our social world

itself." The disagreement is not merely about the meaning or the sense of terms. For

example, a disagreement about whether a particular activity or domain should be

called 'political' is not necessarily a disagreement about the meaning (or the criteria

for the use) of the term and may well be about the range of references of the word.

Skinner gives the example of the debate between the Marxists and liberals over the

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[15] Here it would be interesting to contrast the 'appraisive term' *courageous* with Aristotle's understanding of *courage* as a *virtue*. In *Nicomachaean Ethics,* Aristotle writes how a virtue cannot be spoken of as a precept since "we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use" Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84. Thus neither a person who fears everything nor is one who is daunted by nothing, can be said to be courageous, for he is being neither a coward in fearing everything, nor reckless in fearing nothing. The difference in Skinner's understanding of courage and Aristotle's deliberations on courage thus may be said to differ not in terms of meaning, or range of reference or even attitude but rather in the very understanding of what Skinner calls *appraisive terms* or what Aristotle calls *virtues*!

word 'politics.' What seems like a difference in the meaning the two sides attach to the word is actually only a disagreement, growing out of a consensus about the meaning of the word, over its range of references. Only on understanding completely what the term politics implies can feminists speak, for example, of the politics of gender relations. However with a change in belief or theory a reinterpretation or a redefinition of the criteria of what the term constitutes comes into play. This process can hardly be captured as an argument about the meaning of terms. Rather, as Skinner puts it forcefully, it can only be seen as a significant reconstitution of "a large tract of our cultural experience."[16] Thus the focus cannot be the "internal structure of meaning," but rather should be the reformulation of the cultural experience of the community of users, who previously had a certain understanding of the term, which they reorganize with a change in belief or theory. Skinner exemplifies this with the help of the ways in which the concept of art undergoes a change. But what happens when the argument for the new application of the term fails? Or when the term is not understood and hence applied incorrectly? It is then, Skinner argues, that the term actually acquires a new meaning or a new concept. The new meaning that is thus generated because of a failure to apply correctly the earlier meaning, and is often accompanied by the "total loss of appraisive force"[17] of the term. The new concept would then have to be understood again with the help of the three requirements discussed above.

Let us take an example from the Indian debate, that of 'secularism.' Partha Chatterjee identifies the term secularism as one that has acquired a new meaning

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[16] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 165.

[17] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 167.

because of the failure to apply it correctly in the Indian context. [18] While we can agree

that there has been a failure in the correct application of the term, we need to explore

further whether the term has, after all, assumed a new meaning at all in the Indian

context. It is clear that the usage of the term in India (with the assumed 'new

meaning') cannot draw from the criteria of application of its earlier usage in the

Western context. We may, therefore, rightly say that secularism in India is not

concerned with the separation of the State from the Church. Thus its range of

reference is also not determined by the original context of the term. But for a term to

possess any significant understanding for a community of users there needs to be a

general agreement on the criteria for its use and its range of reference. Are these

criteria met in the case of use of the term secularism in India? Would we be able to

present even a general range of the nature and reference of the term secularism that

would answer to all the various usages of the word in the Indian context?

The proposition underlying this thesis is that there exist no common criteria or

range of reference denoted not only by the term secularism but also by a number of

other keywords of Indian political theorization. The keywords of Indian political

theorization lack a concept. Yet, this thesis argues, the evaluative force of the terms,

which Skinner suggests is often lost in the process of a change of meaning, is

violently retained. To invoke the term secular is to present our evaluation of a

particular action. Thus, when used in the Indian context, the term secularism acquires

strange properties that it did not earlier possess. On the one hand it may seem to have

acquired a new meaning because of the failure to be understood or applied correctly in

its original sense. But in what seems to be a process of acquiring a new meaning, the

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[18] Partha Chatterjee, *A Possible India: Essays in Political Criticism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 231-234.

term changes into a polysemic word that possesses no particular concept, like the words 'being' and 'infinity.' The polysemy that seems to be a desirable quality of Indian usage of Western terms is in fact a symptom of *conceptlessness*. A further puzzle is that, unlike the terms being and infinity, the word secularism in Indian is loaded with evaluative or appraisive force, though it is difficult to say what is being appraised.

This kind of meaning change with no identifiable new concept but nonetheless a strong evaluative component seems to be true of most concepts employed in Indian political theorization. In the first three chapters we shall explore the movement of terms like democracy, nation-state and citizenship from the Western context to Indian usage. We shall investigate the polysemic quality of these concepts and the difficulty of employing them in political theorization. But why do these terms acquire such a strange afterlife in India? What does this kind of meaning change indicate? What does it tell us about our social world?

The answer to the above question will not be found in the investigation of words and concepts. We seem to have reached the limits of the Skinnerian framework. Skinner's methodological critique of Raymond Williams serves to highlight the problem with the conceptual framework of Indian political vocabulary. His analytical rigor however does not offer any explanations for the disorienting behavior of Western political vocabulary in the Indian context. Perhaps the point of departure for our investigation of this uncanny quality of appraisive terms in India should be the question: what are these appraisive terms? In his critique of Williams, Skinner argues that Williams presents no understanding of how certain terms come to become keywords. Skinner does not pursue this question but instead begins to discuss, with

the help of a whole tradition of philosophers of language and moral theorists, the

business of how appraisive terms are understood and applied. Taking the cue from

Skinner, let us in turn investigate what these appraisive terms are.

An Appraisal of Appraisive Terms

The analysis of appraisive terms as pursued by Skinner and the philosophical tradition

he is speaking within presupposes the existence of the category of appraisive terms. A

legitimate question to ask at this point would be: does Skinner provide an account of

how to identify appraisive terms? Skinner would perhaps point to the singular

occurrence of appraisive terms[19] or the way in which they are embedded in 'language

games'[20] or 'speech acts.'[21] The question why appraisive terms are appraisive terms

would seem to belong to the same class of "nonsense questions" as "what is the

meaning of the word 'word'?"[22] It is, however, possible to interrogate appraisive

terms in another way: how does the category of appraisive terms come into being? So

far we have been investigating appraisive terms, evaluative words, keywords and so

on as self-referential terms.[23] If everybody always thinks that a particular term is an

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[19] Here it would be possible to conduct an etymology of various terms and the changes that they undergo.

[20] See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

[21] John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin Books, 1995). See for example J. L. Austin, "The Meaning of a Word," in *Philosophical Papers of J. L. Austin*, ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University*, ed. J. O Urmson (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1962), J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1984), Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*., Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

[22] Austin, "The Meaning of a Word," 57.

[23] Explaining concepts that are self referential, Searle writes "The concepts that name social facts appear to have a peculiar kind of self-referentiality…Logically speaking, the statement 'a certain type of substance, x, is money' implies an indefinite inclusive disjunction of the form 'x is used as money or x is regarded as money, x is believed to be money, etc.' But that seems to have the consequence that the concept of money, the very definition of the word 'money,' is self-referential, because in order that

evaluative term, and they use it as an evaluative term and treat it as an evaluative

term, then it *is* an evaluative term. Further, in being self-referential, these terms

constitute a category that is 'self evident.'[24]

This brings us to the second level of clarification required before we begin a

study of the terms of political theorization. Having adapted Wittgenstein's insight

about the relationship between a concept and the 'general facts of nature,' we have

already recognized the need to examine the relationship between 'facts of culture' or

'historical experience' and political lexicon. What are the general facts of nature that

render a category intelligible, that make them seem self-evident? Or what are the

processes, historical or otherwise, by which concepts come into being and become

understood within a particular society? For Wittgenstein, as for Friedrich Nietzsche,

the logic of concept formation, as also the formation of domains which seem self-

evident, can be understood by positing fictitious accounts of alternative facts of

nature: "What if the truth were the other way around?... So that this very morality

would be guilty if the highest possible power and magnificence of the human type

were never attained? So that this very morality might be the danger of all dangers?"[25]

Nietzsche first asked the question in relation to the value of morals:

> …we must first question the very value of these values. For that we
> need a knowledge of the conditions and circumstance out of which

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a type of thing should satisfy the definition,…it must be believed to be, or used as, or regarded as, etc.,
satisfying the definition…If everybody always thinks that this sort of thing is money, and they use it as
money and treat it as money, then it is money." Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 32.

[24] In an interview Michel Foucault questions categories that he argues have become 'self-evident.'
Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in
Governmentality with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1991), 86.

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale
(New York: Random House, 1969), 6.

> these values grew, under which they have developed and changed (morality as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as hypocrisy, as illness, as misunderstanding—but also morality as cause, as means of healing, as stimulant, as scruples, as poison), a knowledge of the sort which has not been there until now, something which has not even been wished for.
>
> People have taken the worth of these 'values' as something given, as self-evident, as beyond all dispute.[26]

And thus Nietzsche set out to write a genealogy of morals. This genealogy is conducted with fictitious examples of what the "converse"[27] of these values would look like. Drawing from Nietzsche's method of genealogy, Michel Foucault takes up the study of another domain that was hitherto 'self-evident': sexuality. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, *The Will to Knowledge*,[28] Foucault examines "sexuality," a concept referring to a variety of phenomena and discourses that emerged only in nineteenth-century Europe. The domain of sexuality, prior to Foucault's study appeared to be an objective and universal domain, so "self-evident that [historians] believe[d] they [could] write a history of sexuality and repression."[29] While we may have no doubt that sexual activity and terms to refer to it as well as "what we call sexual 'intercourse,' 'union,' or 'relations'"[30] would be present in most cultures, the domain of experience 'sexuality' came about at a specific moment in history and in a particular culture.[31] Moreover, for the concept 'sexuality' to come

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[26] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* 6.

[27] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* 7.

[28] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 3 vols., vol. 1, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin, 1998).

[29] Burchell, Gordon, and Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, 86.

[30] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 35.

[31] Though Foucault's study only refers to the existence of the terms in the Greek and early Roman period, it can undoubtedly be extended to most cultures.

into being, there needed to be a simultaneous presence of several kinds of discourses,

"the development of diverse fields of knowledge; the establishment of a set of rules

and norms—in part traditional, in part new—which found support in religious,

judicial, pedagogical, and medical institutions; and changes in the way individuals

were lead to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures,

their feelings, their sensations, their dreams."[32] That is to say, the constitution of an

experience which causes individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a

'sexuality' or as desiring subjects. To be able to understand the emergence of

'sexuality' thus necessitates the "historical and critical study dealing with desire and

the desiring subject. In other words... undertaking a 'genealogy.'"[33] This genealogy is

nothing but the critical study of the processes—phenomena and discourses—by which

individuals begin to experience themselves as subjects of a domain. As Foucault

explains:

> Three domains of genealogy are possible. First, a historical ontology of
> ourselves[34] in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves
> as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in
> relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as
> subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology of ourselves in
> relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral
> agents.[35]

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[32] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 3.

[33] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 5.

[34] When Foucault speaks of the "historical ontology of ourselves," he is speaking of the Christian West. He consistently speaks of the ancient Greeks as "they," or "them," as he does of the Chinese. He says "freedom for the Greeks signifies non-slavery—which is quite a different definition of freedom from *our own*—the problem is already entirely political."(emphasis added) Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, trans. Robert Hurley and others, Paul Rabinow ed., vol. 1, *Essential Works of Foucault: 1954-1984* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 286. Thus when Foucault speaks of the 'historical ontology of ourselves' it is always to be read as the historical ontology of the modern West, or the Christian West.

[35] Foucault, *Ethics*, 262.

The common thread in the genealogical investigation of the three domains of experience is the formation of subjectivities—processes by which individuals understand themselves as subjects of knowledge, governance (power) or norms. Genealogical studies would thus answer the questions Foucault poses in "What is Enlightenment?":

> How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?[36]

It is as an answer to these questions that we must locate the various genealogical studies conducted by Foucault. In an attempt to understand how subjectivities are constituted Foucault undertakes the study of domains like sexuality, governmentality and truth. By what processes do people begin to understand themselves as desiring subjects, as subjects who imagine themselves to be in a constant state of war, or as subjects who need to renounce themselves to arrive at truth? In the process of constituting individuals as subjects, discourses of sexuality, of the state, or of truth, have thus been created as objective domains. In *The History of Sexuality*, for example Foucault identifies the various medical, confessional and legal discourses that come to constitute a domain of experience called sexuality. This 'objectification of objectivities' is what Foucault investigates. And it is this kind of investigation that constitutes a "historical ontology" of the West, the ways in which the West understands itself.[37] Only this historical ontology can reveal the intelligibility of the

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[36] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, *Essential Works of Foucault: 1954-1984* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 318.

[37] It has become customary to question the use of binaries such as the East/West. But such an *a priori* anti-essentialism does not heed the significant questions about the differences of cultural and historical experiences that the problem of orientalism brings to the fore. The terms East and West need to be understood with reference to the question of historical ontology as we have been interpreting it.

theoretical and conceptual conflicts that have shaped the Western experience and its

lexicon.

The genealogical process by which Foucault arrives at a historical ontology of the

West involves the mapping of a relationship between the categories and domains

which seem to *exist*, as it were, and the grid through which they are rendered

intelligible. In other words a historical ontology would explain the objectification of

objective domains and the modes of subjectification of the subjects of those domains.

Or to put it more sharply, it is only the historical experience that is constituted by the

modes of subjectification and objectification that would allow us to experience the

domains that are used as categories to evaluate ourselves. It is only the singular

historical experience of the West (captured by the phrase 'historical ontology of

ourselves') that provides a basis for an experience of categories such as sexuality,

nation-state, madness and so on.

Orientalism and Political Lexicon

One aspect of the historical ontology of the West that is crucial for our study is

Orientalism or the way in which the West understands itself by representing the East

as the Other. "Orientalism is never far from what Denis Hay has called the idea of

Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against 'those' non-

Europeans…"[38] The representation of the East or the 'Orient,' its culture and political

processes, is not an activity which has recently become fashionable. Beginning with

the early travelogues, followed by transcripts on the administration of the colonies,

the statements on the life and customs of the natives, the study of the origin of Indic

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[38] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001), 7.

languages, up to the unceasing battery of 'area studies,' the East has been a vibrant

and fertile object of study. The publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*,[39] however,

brought about a sensitization to the study of the East. That is to say, studies of the

studies of the East began to be undertaken. Said's *Orientalism* observed that the

discourses on the Orient formed certain patterns: irrespective of the location or period

of articulation and regardless of the specific object of study, the descriptions and

representations of the Orient are markedly similar. Various texts about the Orient,

written over several centuries by people from linguistically varied and geographically

distant areas come to resemble one another so closely that they form an identifiable

body of information. This 'information' Said refers to as "Orientalism." Within this

body of information that the West presented as 'knowledge'[40] of the Orient, there

was, Said observed, a curious relationship that texts exhibited to each other. Each text

reflected and related to another, thus creating a web of intertexuality. This whole

network of intertextual information neither corresponds to the 'real' Orient nor is it

"*essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality."[41] Since Orientalism

is not just an idea, a fantasy or a misimpression of the Orient, it would not "simply

blow away" [42] once the truth about the real Orient was presented. Several Orientalists

who encountered the Orient for the first time expressed a disappointment with what

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[39] Said, *Orientalism.*

[40] Said claims that the body of writing generated by Orientalism cannot be regarded as 'knowledge' about the Orient but rather as a series of beliefs about the Orient. Nevertheless he continues to refer to the content of the Orientalist texts as 'knowledge' or 'knowledges' (Said, *Orientalism*.) Similarly when the term Orientalist knowledge is used in this thesis, it is with the awareness that the 'beliefs' presented in Orientalist texts are not knowledge about the Orient but what was considered as knowledge of the Orient by the Orientalists.

[41] Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

[42] Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

they saw; they understood this as a degeneration or a corruption of the Orient and did

not see their information/ knowledge about the Orient as a misunderstanding.

What Remains Un-Said

There is a certain amount of consensus among scholars that Said's *Orientalism* has

had a deep impact on postcolonial social science studies,[43] though it is unclear what

the result of this impact has been. For if social scientists are attempting to critique

Orientalist knowledge as lies and myths and attempting to give 'true' descriptions of

the East or 'correct' theories about the East, it is necessary to reiterate Said's thesis

that Orientalism cannot be erased, overcome or critiqued by telling the truth about the

Orient.[44] Moreover if the post-colonial voice is 'writing back' (or *speaking* back),

then this writing/speech will have to address more seriously the scope of Said's study

and the Orientalist grid of intelligibility. It is unfortunate, therefore, that most

contemporary political theorization (and social science in general) tends to

conveniently sidestep or ignore it, even though in political theory or political science

there is a mild acknowledgement that the kind of knowledge of politics produced

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[43] Gyan Prakash begins his essay 'Orientalism Now,' thus: "Edward Said's Orientalism has lived a seditious life. Since 1978, when it launched an audacious attack on Western representations of the Orient, the book has breathed insurgency." He summarizes the influence of Orientalism: "An indeterminacy emerged in the authority of Western knowledge as it was brought down from its Olympian heights to expose its involvement in Western power. It is this indeterminacy that has served as a provocation to rethink the modern West from the position of the Other, to go beyond Orientalism itself in exploring the implications of its demonstration that the East/West opposition is an externalization of an internal division in the modern West. Even if Orientalism performs this task inadequately, the proliferation of the postcolonial "writing back" would be unimaginable without it." Gyan Prakash, "Orientalism Now," *History and Theory* 34, no. 3 (Oct 1995): 199-212.

[44] Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

about the East was not only Orientalist but also one which was systematically

deployed to govern the colonies.[45]

Studies in a number of other fields in the humanities and social sciences,

however, contributed to a significant body of post-Orientalist theory.[46] Literary

theory,[47] culture studies and, to an extent, sociology and history do show the influence

of *Orientalism*.[48] Studies within these disciplines drew considerably from the

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[45] For example Karl Marx's essay on Oriental Despotism is dismissed as an embarrassing comment and not taken very seriously, since it is commonly understood that the representations of the East by most scholars of his period would, willy nilly, be Orientalist.

[46] See for example influential works like Leonard Bell, "Artists and Empire: Victorian Representations of Subject People," *Art History* 5, no. 1 (Mar., 1982), Tony Bennett, *Outside Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (Spring, 1984), Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen* 24, no. 6 (Nov.- Dec., 1983), Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *Language. Politics and Theory, a Selection of Papers from the Annual Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, 1976-1984*, ed. et al Francis Barker (London & New York: Methuen, 1986), James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 2, no. 119 (Spring, 1983), James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (Oct., 1981), Joanathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Selected Essays* (New York & London: Verso, 1986), Giles Gunn, *The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), Francesca Kazan, "Confabulations in a Passage to India," *Criticism* 29, no. 2 (Spring, 1984), Thomas R. Metcalf, "Architecture and the Representation of Empire: India, 1860-1910," *Representations* (Spring, 1984), K. N. Panikkar, "Culture and Ideology: Contradictions in Intellectual Transformation of Colonial Society in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 22, no. 49 (Dec., 1987), Frances B. Singh, "A Passage to India, the National Movement, and Independence," *Twentieth Century Literature* (Spring-Fall, 1985).

[47] See for example Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "After 'Orientalism': Colonialism and English Literary Studies in India," *Social Scientist* 14, no. 7 (Jul., 1986), Rukmini Bhaya Nair, "Fictional Selves, Empire's Fictions: The Poets of John Company," in *Tropic Crucible: Self and Theory in Language and Literature*, ed. Ranjit Chatterjee and Colin Nicholson (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1984), David Birch, *Language, Literature and Critical Practice: Ways of Analysing Text* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), Daniel Bivona, "Alice the Child-Imperialist and the Games of Wonderland," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 41, no. 2 (Sep., 1986), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), Gauri Viswanathan, "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India," *Oxford Literary Review* (1987), Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), René Wellek, "Criticism in the University," *Partisan Review* 53, no. 4 (1986).

[48] See Vivek Dhareshwar, "Valorizing the Present: Orientalism, Postcoloniality and the Human Sciences," *Cultural Dynamics* 10, no. 2 (1998), Prakash, "Orientalism Now", Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Post Colonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986), Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and

theoretical perspectives provided by Said, which in turn owe their framework to

Foucault and Gramsci.[49] The influence of *Orientalism* has brought about a revaluation

of the knowledge within these disciplines. That is to say, the literature has become

more conscious of Orientalist writing and criticism and has begun to employ

Orientalist critiques of texts as well as syllabi used in the study of English literature.

Historiography has also paid special attention to what kind of material was deployed

in the making of Orientalist knowledge and expressed the need for non-Orientalist

histories.

But even with the amount of attention and following Said's work has attracted,

his project remains incomplete. There is no systematic attempt at deconstructing the

'knowledge' of Orientalism and analyzing its components and categories. There has

been nothing, other than an intuitive groping, that allows us to classify certain kinds

of studies as Orientalist and others as not. What makes Orientalist writing Orientalist?

Is it merely that it was produced by the West about the East? So then can all Western

understanding of the East be classified as Orientalism? What would alternative self-

representations by the East entail? That is to say, while *Orientalism* has presented a

study of the 'study' of the East by the West, what would a self-study of the East look

like? Would a self-characterization of the East escape the limits that were placed on

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Politics in the Third World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (Jan 1992), Gyan
Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian
Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (Apr 1990).

[49] Said, *Orientalism*, 14.

Western understanding of the East?[50] In other words, is it possible for the East to

represent itself?

Our earlier discussion of Foucault's historical ontology of the Western

experience allows us to sharpen these questions and in the process better understand

Orientalism, or the limits of the West's understanding, as described by Said. An

important aspect of the Orientalist misrepresentation of the East by the West, of the

limits of the West's understanding, is the pernicious ability of the categories of

Western experience—categories that are only intelligible within that particular

historical experience, categories such as sexuality, religion, nation-state, citizenship,

etc. (and we shall examine some of them in greater detail in the following chapters)—

to masquerade as empty categories in which any historically contingent experience

can be filled in.[51] They are in actuality specific discursive utterances formed by a

series of specific discourses, which Foucault's study provided us with a handle on.

This raises the question: What does it really mean to say things like 'sexuality in the

Greek period,' or 'nation-state in India?'

The Orientalist literature is littered with instances of an unquestioned faith in the

universal character of Western categories. For example, the relationship of Christians

to the Bible is very different from the relationship of 'Hindus' to the Vedas. But for a

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[50] Orientalism has often been understood as a political conspiracy, whereby a similar series of lore gets repeated and rehashed in order to establish the hegemony of one culture over the other. Though the production of Orientalist texts is often related to Western imperialism, Orientalism cannot merely be treated as a rationale for the formation and subjugation of the colonies. Said clarifies that orientalism can be seen as those "set of constraints upon and limitations of thought" of the West" whereby it understands the Orient only through its own categories of understanding and presents the Orient as a familiar and recognizable deviant of themselves.

[51] In later chapters we shall examine how these categories go through a process of catholicization or universalization, or what we can call 'secularization.' Also see S.N. Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness…: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994).

long time a direct one-to-one correspondence was drawn between these two

relationships, with the result that Hindus in Orientalist tracts were condemned as

irreligious, corrupt or degenerate since they were not even well versed with their holy

book.[52] The investigation of these categories of understanding then becomes a

necessary step in explaining and responding to Orientalism.

In light of Foucault's insight, we can reformulate the question of the self-

understanding of the East thus: Assuming that such a characterization (of the East by

itself) is indeed possible, given the surfeit of material that Asian and South East Asian

studies scholars have generated in recent years, will it be able to escape the categories

of Western experience with their claims of universality?

With this question in mind, the thesis will examine the categories of Orientalist

investigation and knowledge that contemporary Indian theory has inherited in order to

gain an insight into the difficulty with contemporary attempts to understand or

conceptualize the domains of experience in India, whether or not we call them

political, moral, ethical, religious, and so on.

Problematizing Categories of Investigation

The concepts and categories with which the West understands the East are the

concepts which are and have been, not only a part of Western theorization, but also of

Western knowledge production in general.[53] Even a cursory study of these categories

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[52] A much more detailed and systematic understanding of this misinterpretation can be found in Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness…: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*.

53 "If we characterize the product of learning as 'knowledge'…by producing knowledge human beings manage to live in the world; there are different kinds of knowledge; in each culture, different kinds of knowledges are present; these constitute the reservoir of cultures." Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness…: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*, 445-446.

reveals that they are not only restricted to Orientalist knowledge but also form central analytic categories of contemporary political theory in India. Though post-Independence political theory claims to be free from Orientalist understanding, this is more an optimistic moral affirmation than an indication that the task has been accomplished. According to this understanding, Orientalism is merely an attitude (a negative one) and not a limitation of understanding. Thus an empathetic, or rather a favorable, attitude towards Indian culture would open up a way to escape Orientalist understandings. The problem, however, is not of taking pro- or anti- attitudes, but of understanding the 'constraints' on thought that resulted in Orientalism. This necessitates a study of the categories of Orientalist knowledge.

In the process of examining the categories used to theorize Indian politics, we will attempt to address the questions that we began with: Why are all kinds of political communities read as nation-states? Why is citizenship presented as the only form of membership to a political community? Why is history presented as the only way in which people relate to their past or tradition?

We will undertake to demonstrate that the categories within which we attempt to frame our experience are constitutive of the Western historical ontology. In the subsequent chapters we shall sharpen the claim that the historical ontology of the West is a grid of intelligibility for these categories by interrogating three specific concepts—nation-state, citizenship, and history—and their cognates. These categories form the basis of the overarching discourse of democracy that dominates the Indian political discourse. This recognition would, minimally, demonstrate why our contemporary theories are unable to make sense of our 'political reality.' More fundamentally, this would open up a way for reflections on the domains of Indian

experience that we have hitherto been calling 'politics,' or 'history.' While our study

will throw up some clues for a reconceptualization of these domains, this thesis will

not attempt to provide a new understanding or a different interpretation of Indian

politics, nor will it present a new language or set of concepts. The thesis will attempt

to show that an alternative way of theorizing Indian politics cannot be undertaken

before the contemporary political lexicon is deconstructed.

The first chapter investigates the *vocabulary* of Indian political theory,

crystallized as the discourse of democracy, and identifies three groups on the basis of

the way in which they perceive and thus employ the lexicon of Indian political

thought. Each of these three groups represents a different and distinct position on the

correspondence between the language of political theory and the political reality they

seek to represent. For the first group, the Indian political language is understood as an

indigenous discourse that is rendered in a foreign language. Thus they recognize the

concepts of the Indian political lexicon as signifiers of the Indian experience from

antiquity to modernity. It would therefore not be unusual for the members of this

group to argue that India has always had a democracy or nation-state and so on. The

second group recognizes that the categories of political language in India are a

product of Western modernity. There is a slight confusion about whether these

categories aptly capture our experience or not. Are we as modern as the categories

with which we describe ourselves or are we not yet there? The third group too admits

that our vocabulary is derivative of modern Western thought but it contends that the

concepts acquire a specifically Indian meaning when they arrive in India. A closer

study of the way in which these groups elaborate their understanding of the terms of

theorization reveals that there is actually no concept underlying the use of these terms but merely a strong evaluative force.

In an attempt to understand this strange character of the modern political idiom when used to describe the Indian experience, we undertake, in the next three chapters, a critical study of the key categories of Western political thought—the nation-state, citizen, and history—that have traveled to the Indian discourse to constitute the discourse of democracy. These keywords of political investigation are a product of the Western historical ontology—a unique historical experience itself constituted by the normative discourses of sovereignty, history, and the nation-state. The nation-state is sovereign and its citizen is an autonomous choosing subject. The history of/for the West is thus the history of sovereignty. To understand the concepts that these terms embody we examine the historical/cultural experience of the West that gives intelligibility to these terms. In order to understand and characterize this experience, we will contrast it with examples from cultures that are not part of the historical ontology of the West, in particular, the ancient Greek civilization and contemporary Indian culture. The ancient Greek civilization is seen as part of the 'past' of the West, and yet it does not play a significant role in the formation of its historical ontology. The relationship that the contemporary West has with the ancient Greeks is a tenuous one. The modern West sees the Greeks as their ancestors and simultaneously represents their culture as the 'cradle' of the Western civilization. India, on the other hand, has been represented as the other of the West. While this thesis does not take the binary of East/West as an essentialist division between two cultures, the fact remains that the Indian experience has little to offer to the shaping of the ontology of the Western experience, save as its Other.

In the second chapter we will try to understand the concept of nation-state. The nation-state is a taxonomic mongrel. The inquiry of this concept would thus look at the dominant discourses of the nation and the state and also frame them within the larger story of sovereignty as told by Michel Foucault. The third chapter investigates the category of the sovereign citizen. Drawing on a model proposed by Etienne Balibar, it situates the category of citizenship within three 'epochs' of the Western political process—the ancient, the modern and the postmodern—and demonstrates the unintelligibility of the idea of citizenship in the ancient epoch. It also asks what the experience of citizenship could imply in India. History, the frame within which the discourses of the concepts of the West gain coherence will be examined in the fourth chapter. Has history always served as a frame for our past and present experiences? The fifth chapter addresses some of the questions that we could only answer incompletely in the previous three chapters. Through a study of the nineteenth century novel, *Sarasvatīcandra*, this chapter will try to situate the necessary incoherence of the modern political idiom in the attempt to codify a domain of experience in ways that render the domain unintelligible to itself. This incoherence is a ghostly presence in most postcolonial attempts at self-understanding. This thesis explores this unintelligibility to provide the groundwork necessary for addressing the larger problem: how do we represent the domain we call the Indian moral/political/historical experience?

Chapter 1

Re-presenting Indian Democracy: Theories, Explanations and Descriptions of Indian Politics

> Well then, since previous thinkers have left the subject of legislation unexamined, it is better, perhaps, if we ourselves start a further investigation of it, and of the constitution in general, so that as far as possible that *part of philosophy that deals with things human* may be brought to completion…First, then, if anything that has been well said on any particular point by our predecessors, let us attempt to discuss that…[1]
>
> Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics*

> How is it that the accumulating corpus of knowledge, deriving from two centuries of imperial involvement, has not proved a firmer foundation for modern political studies?[2]
>
> Hugh Tinker, "The Rediscovery of India"

The domain of politics—what constitutes politics—is not self-evident. Even in the modern[3] context, the term 'politics' has several referents. It could be used to describe structures and processes as varied as: (i) relationships involving power such as those between men and women, between the elite and the subaltern or between a capitalist and a worker; (ii) the practice of governance; (iii) opinions on public affairs; (iv) acts of manipulation and negotiation; (v) mobilization of people into self-conscious political organizations such as political parties, trade unions and interest groups; and

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[1] Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 258. The words "legislation" and "constitution" also appear as 'politics,' 'political systems' and 'legislative systems.' In another translation the sentence reads "Since, then, our predecessors have left the area of legislation uncharted, it is better to examine it ourselves instead, and indeed to examine political systems in general, and so to complete the philosophy of human affairs, as far as we are able." Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1999), 171.

[2] Hugh Tinker, "The Rediscovery of India," *International Affairs* 45, no. 1 (Jan., 1969): 95.

[3] I use the terms ancient and modern in the sense in which Etienne Balibar uses them to speak of three 'epochs' of Western political theory. These epochs have been discussed at length in the third chapter.

(vi) political philosophies or ideologies such as Marxism, liberalism, or *hindutva*.

Within Indian political theorization, the understanding of politics has crystallized

largely into a discourse on democracy. For an understanding of democracy, one looks,

almost unreflectively, to the categories of the nation-state, citizenship and its various

cognates.[4] It is as though we have chosen to find an understanding of politics in those

categories that are available at hand, much like looking for a lost object where there is

light rather than where it is likely to be found.[5] Is our political functioning captured by

the concept of democracy?[6] Are the concepts of the nation-state, citizenship and

democracy adequate explanatory categories of our political experience or do we

employ them merely because they have come to assume universal currency? Does the

ubiquity of these agglomerative categories actually provide an affirmation of the fact

that they actually *mean* something in the context of Indian politics?

Another key category in the study of contemporary politics in India is that of

history. The study of Indian politics, no matter how contemporary, surreptitiously

becomes, or at least significantly involves, a study of Indian history. Understanding

contemporary Indian politics necessitates a study of the history of the contemporary

nation-state, of the formation of the identities of citizen-subjects and the inuring of

older centers of power into newer institutional frames, or the dissolution or

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[4] This impulse is, however, not just an Indian affliction. In a chapter curiously titled "Democracy is a Lake," Charles Tilly argues that "[in] order to get to democracy, we must work our way down a chain including state, polity, rights, citizenship…" Charles Tilly, "Democracy Is a Lake," in *The Social Construction of Democracy: 1870 - 1990*, ed. George Reid Andrews and Herrick Chapman (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

[5] While it is possible that the place where the object is lost is one that is illuminated, the reason for searching for the lost item in a well-lit spot should be that it is where it is likely to be found rather than the fact that it is brightly lit.

[6] The assertion that India *is* a democracy or *is not* a democracy would both imply that the category of democracy is employed to characterize the Indian political situation.

reorganization of traditional power structures into modern social relationships. The

category of history too is not an unproblematic one. The question 'What is history?'

assumes a much greater significance in India, especially after the relentless assertions

(especially in the nineteenth century) that India did not, and cannot, have a history.[7]

The categories of state and history are, for Hegel, intermeshed; the state lends content

to the "prose of history" and since India has neither state nor a concept of humanity, it

cannot have a history. In an almost ironic turn of events, it appears that Hegel may be

proved right and India has given itself a history only after the formation of the Indian

state. But what of the epics, chronicles, *nāmās*, *caritras*, to name a few types of texts

that are identified as capturing a way of relating to the past? Can we speak of these as

a history of the pre-colonial state in India and a record of it? Can we write about the

Mughal sultanate or the Gupta or Maurya kingdoms as states? These questions will be

taken up in the subsequent chapters. Here we merely identify the cluster of concepts

that are central to Indian political theorization and investigate what they reflect about

our political reality.

In the introduction we discussed Raymond Williams's proposal that there are

"keywords" that reflect "matters of historical and contemporary substance."[8]

Similarly, can we argue that the keywords of political theory inform us on matters of

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[7] While Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is most commonly identified as holding such an opinion, he is merely a representative of a popular school of thought that asserts India's lack of history. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). James Mill in his well known *History of British India,* writes of a "consensus" on the absence of "historical composition… in the literature of Hindus." James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 6 (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1826). This lack of history is often attributed to the Hindus rather than to India/Indians. Alberuni is said to have '*politely*' pointed out that "the Hindus do not pay much attention to the historical order of things." Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," *History and Theory* 34, no. 2 (May 1995): 58.

[8] Quentin Skinner, *Regarding Method*, vol. 1, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158.

political substance? To explore this question, let us recapitulate the argument that we

set out in the introduction. Critiquing Williams's *Keywords*, Quentin Skinner asks,

"But what kinds of awareness can we hope to attain from studying the history of

keywords?"[9] Arguing for a more stringent methodological relationship between

keywords and the insight into political life that they offer, Skinner proposes an

examination of the relationship between words and concepts. He denies, at the outset,

any direct equivalence between words and concepts. While a community may possess

a concept, the word for it may be absent until a much later historical period. Thus it

may be argued that the idea of a nation and state was always present in India, only the

words nation and state were imported during the Raj. A second possibility is that a

word may be used with perfect consistency by a community of users and yet may not

have a "concept that answers to any of [its] agreed usages."[10] Thus we may also be

able to say that though an entire group of people in the Asian subcontinent speaks of

democracy and citizenship, it possesses no concept of democracy or citizenship.

Skinner proposes a three-fold test to ascertain this correspondence between words

(especially keywords or what Skinner calls "appraisive terms") and concepts. The test

sets out three criteria or requirements for assessing or determining whether the

recurrent use of a word in different discourses actually shows the existence of a

concept. The test involves:

    1. An understanding of the criteria for the use of the word or the conditions under

which the term may be applied.

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[9] Skinner, *Regarding Method,* 158.

[10] Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 160.

2. Knowledge of the range of references of the word, that is, the circumstances in which the word can be applied to particular situations.

3. A grasp of the range of attitudes which the term expresses or the 'speech-acts' the word can be used to perform.

This test shall serve to frame our investigation of the vocabulary of Indian politics, enabling us to identify how we can understand terms of political discourse in India. This task is necessary because the Indian political discourse is fraught with conflicting understandings of its terminology. Contemporary Indian political language is understood either as an indigenous discourse that is rendered in another language; or as a literal translation or a direct implantation of the Western political discourse; or as a derivative discourse. In all these cases it is, nevertheless, necessary to investigate what the criteria and range of reference of these terms are and ask what it is that lends intelligibility to them.

We Always Had It…

> Bharat-Mata…the embodiment of *Prakriti*…is the dynamic element in our ethical consciousness…. It is the spirit of Nationality in national life and evolution.[11]
>
>   Bipin Chandra Pal, *The Soul of India*

> India has hitherto been a nation which is now being disintegrated.[12]
>
>   Pramatha Nath Bose, *Swaraj—Cultural and Political*

> The experience of Ancient India with republicanism, if better known, would by itself make democracy seem less of a freakish development,

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[11] Bipin Chandra Pal, *The Soul of India: A Constructive Study of Indian Thoughts and Ideals* (Madras: Tagore and Co., 1923), 17.

[12] Pramatha Nath Bose, *Swaraj—Cultural and Political* (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1929), 48.

and help dispel the common idea that the very concept of democracy is specifically 'Western.'[13]

Steve Muhlberger, "Democracy in Ancient India"

One kind of understanding of the concepts of Indian political theorization is that all the categories and concepts have an origin in the ancient Indian political, social or religious domain. The writers who subscribe to such an explanation of Indian political terminology tend to examine the earliest periods of Indian civilization wherein they locate the origin of the categories of contemporary political ethos. In an essay published in 1964, Baljit Singh announces:

> It is said that democracy as a concept was introduced to India by the British. We shall endeavor to demonstrate that political thinking in India has always been based upon the theory that power is ultimately vested in the people collectively (essentials of democracy). It is, however, a trust to be fulfilled and implemented by the sovereign in accordance with those doctrines of the continuity of existence and the stability of supreme law, which are the foundations of all Indian thought both sacred and secular.[14]

While some writers identify the origin in the mythic past of India, that is, in the epics or the *purānas* or similar texts, other writers prefer to locate the origins in a more recent past; in the kingdoms of the Mughals, Marathas or the Mauryas and Guptas. Thus India is said to possess a nation, state, history and an understanding of the concept of democracy.

One story of the origin of the Indian nation is often located in the narrative of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Appearing in the *Ādi Parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, this

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[13] Steve Muhlberger, "Democracy in Ancient India" (unpublished manuscript), http://www.hvk.org/specialrepo/demo/index.html.

[14] Baljit Singh, "The Sources of Contemporary Political Thought in India: A Reappraisal," *Ethics* 75, no. 1 (Oct., 1964): 57.

story ends with the recognition of the love child of Shakuntala and Dushyanta, Bharat,

from whom India, or *Bhāratvarsh*, gets its name. According to Bipin Chandra Pal,

Bharat, the great king, brought the people of India together to form one cultural unit

though the administrative centers rested with the local princes and kings. Pal proceeds

to identify federalism as a central component of Indian nationality, contrasting it with

the Western understanding of nation, which he claims was essentially territorial.

Because of a federal government, the cultural differences between the people in the

different principalities were secure and yet a cultural unity or a national spirit could be

maintained.[15] The Hindu religion/culture contain, according to Pal, the very essence

of "what we now understand as Nationalism."[16] K. M. Panikkar identifies the Gupta

period as one that demonstrates a political unity and thus the seeds of nationalism.

This political unity survived the invasions of the "Mongol and Tartar people" and

resurrected itself as a "national idea" which underlay the "great Mahratta Empire."[17]

Similarly, the formation of the Indian state is credited to the Mauryas, the Guptas,

the Mughals or the Marathas. The principalities in ancient India are said to have

heralded a highly sophisticated political organization that had a formal legal and

refined economic system. A. S. Altekar draws attention to the existence of a

republican-style local government within a larger republic or state in ancient India.[18]

In another study of the state in India, V. S. Agrawala concludes on the basis of his

interpretation of Panini that the various states or *janapadas* in India were either

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[15] Pal, *The Soul of India: A Constructive Study of Indian Thoughts and Ideals*, 45, 52-58.

[16] Bipin Chandra Pal, *Nationality and Empire: A Running Study of Some Current Indian Problems* (Simla: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1916), 34.

[17] K. M Panikkar, *Indian Nationalism: Its Origin, History and Ideals* (London: 1929), 11-15.

[18] A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, 3rd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1958), 114-115.

subject to a monarch or governed as republics.[19] In another study of the *Political History of Ancient India,* Hemachandra Raychaudhuri asserts that republicanism was as popular a mode of government as monarchy in ancient India.[20] Texts like Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* are often cited to demonstrate the existence of a state and state-craft in India.[21] Romila Thapar discusses the origin of the concept of the state in India:

> With the discussion of the *saptanga* theory in Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* the concept of the state can be said to have arrived.[22]

The existence of the Indian state is certified by the allegorical representations of the polity. The comparison of the human body to the body politic suggests, according to Hartmut Scharfe, an indigenous notion of the state.[23] Majumdar elaborates this conception of the state with references to *Arthasāstra*:

> The state was conceived as an organic whole, like a human body, and its constituent parts are actually called *angas* (limbs). On an ultimate analysis of the conception of the State, seven such limbs were recognized….This is a surprisingly modern conception though, like many other political theories, it was never developed in later times.[24]

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[19] V.S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Panini: A Study of the Cultural Material in the Ashatadhyayi*, 2nd ed. (Varanasi: Prithvi Prakashan, 1963), 426-429.

[20] Hemachandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[21] See for example Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India.*, Agrawala, *India as Known to Panini: A Study of the Cultural Material in the Ashatadhyayi.*, R. C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951).

[22] Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 392.

[23] Hartmut Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989). A similar argument is available in P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973).

[24] R. C. Majumdar, *Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 1952), 142.

Within this category of writers, there are some who assert, either as a corollary to the existence of a nation and state in India or otherwise, that India had known democratic institutions long before the arrival of the British. U. N. Ghoshal finds that the governing institution in ancient India was actually a 'welfare state.'[25] Lala Lajpat Rai, in an article on ancient Indian culture published posthumously, writes:

> Government in ancient India was much more civilized and humane and in a way more democratic than it has been in any country in the world before the eighteenth century A. D. In certain respects it would bear good comparison even with modern Governments of Europe and America.[26]

R. C. Majumdar too believes that life in ancient India had a democratic element to it; he locates this element in the villages of India. The self-governing units, the panchayats and local village power centers, that is to say, the micro organizations within a village polity, were essentially democratic even if the larger state was a monarchical one.[27]

…Or Did We?

> It can hardly be claimed for writings in this classification that they shed much light on the origins of modern Indian nationalism.[28]
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> Bruce McCully, "The Origins of Indian Nationalism According to the Natives."

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[25] U.N. Ghosal *A History of Indian Political Ideas:* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[26] Lala Lajpat Rai, "Europeanization and the Ancient Culture of India," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 145, no. Part 2: India (Sept., 1929): 194.

[27] R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Firma K. L Mukhopadhyay, 1969), 35.

[28] Brian McCully, "The Origins of Indian Nationalism According to the Natives," *The Journal of Modern History* 7, no. 3 (Sep., 1935): 299.

It may be said without laboring too much over the point that the use of terms by the writers of this group is fairly loose. When they argue about the existence of nation, state, republic and democracy in ancient India, they do not possess a theory of what it means to be a nation, state or republic, nor do they have an articulate concept of democracy. What we come to understand, however, by these terms is that to possess them is essentially a good thing. These concepts unequivocally communicate a positive or desirable content. Thus no writer would mournfully claim that India has always been a nation, and few would argue for the annihilation of the state.

Several writers within this group do not actually assert that India was a nation, as in a physical unit with demarcated territorial limits, but they claim that there was, in ancient India, a spirit of nationality. This spirit of nationality is identified as a cultural unity amongst the members of what later came to be known as India. Bipin Chandra Pal asserts that the spirit of nationality transcends geographical boundaries or territorial aspirations. It was neither a racial unity nor a linguistic one. *Bhāratmāta*, or the spirit of nationality is to be found at the core of the Hindu ethical consciousness. And thus he says that Muslim rule may have established a common government or a state, but it did not mar the cultural unity of *Bhāratvarsha*. Thus, for Pal, the idea of a common Hindu culture predates the nation *Bhārat*. But Pal also recognizes that the Hindus were a people so named after the land from which they hailed.[29] Har Bilas Sarda also speaks of the Hindu contribution to the idea of nationality in India. He, however, speaks of the Hindu people as a 'race' that constitutes the nation.[30] Radhakumud Mookherjee, on the other hand, understands the Indian nation as a

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[29] Pal, *Nationality and Empire: A Running Study of Some Current Indian Problems*.

[30] Har Bilas Sarda, *Hindu Superiority: An Attempt to Determine the Position of the Hindu Race on the Scale of Nations* (Ajmer: 1906).

territorial entity. As the ancient people acquired fixed territory they began to look

upon it as their motherland and deified it into a nation.[31] But who were these 'people'

and how did they identify themselves as a community before the crystallization of the

nation? In making claims about the ancient origin of the Indian nation, do these

writers possess a common concept of *nation*?

The understanding of the state in these writings is an even murkier one. After

asserting that the conception of the state in India was a remarkably modern one,

Majumdar goes on to elaborate the scope of the state's activities:

> Its scope of activities was all embracing, and no distinction was made
> between personal and civic rights and duties, or even between moral
> principles and positive law. Everything that had any bearing upon the
> moral and spiritual nature or material condition of a man came within
> the scope of the State's activities.[32]

While at first glance this reads as a description of the ancient Indian state, a more

critical evaluation of the concept of state that Majumdar proposes begs the question:

what then was understood as not being the state? Majumdar's description of the state

sounds surprisingly similar to the descriptions offered of religion in India: being all

encompassing, influencing all aspects of life, making no distinction between personal

or political, and so on. Are we then calling the same thing both religion and state?

According to Majumdar:

> It [the State] was based on the concept of *Dharma*, which sustained
> life, as embracing all the activities of an individual which were
> interrelated to one another and subserved the sole purpose of human

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[31] Radhakumud Mookherjee, *Nationalism in Hindu Culture* (London: 1921).

[32] Majumdar, *Ancient India*, 143.

existence viz. spiritual salvation. This totalitarian view of life explains the totalitarian character of the State.[33]

To account for the nature of the ancient state in his scheme, Majumdar needs to identify it as 'totalitarian.' However, in the very next sentence he writes:

But although the State was totalitarian in its scope of activities, it did not adopt the totalitarian method in carrying out its functions.[34]

Can the state be totalitarian but not totalitarian in its functions? Since Majumdar's study may be discounted as a dated attempt at historicizing the state, let us review a more contemporary study by Romila Thapar. According to her:

The state is characterized by *concentration of political authority* generally in the hands of an erstwhile senior lineage of which one family claims complete power, a claim which is legitimized by the priests as being based amongst other things on agencies other than human, such as an association with the gods (emphasis added).[35]

But there is also, according to Thapar, no sharp demarcation between a lineage system and a state. The descriptions of the lineage system and state system merely suggest that as, a group of people grew from a small community to a larger one, they adopted certain techniques of living that were slightly different from those practiced when a community consisted of only a few families. Taxation and maintaining an army were some of those things. In a more detailed analysis of the arrival of the state in ancient India, Thapar writes:

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[33] Majumdar, *Ancient India*, 143.

[34] Majumdar, *Ancient India*, 143.

[35] Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, 378.

> Many of these new ideologies [of Buddhism and Jainism] hark back to
> the values of the lineage societies…These values were sought to be
> resurrected or continued in the monastic institutions. But the
> contradiction in the situation was that in order to maintain the
> monasteries the new religions required, in the initial stages, both the
> direct patronage of the state as well as a society rich enough to support
> the monks through alms. Such a society would presuppose at least the
> rudiments of the state, and to that extent a decline in the lineage
> society.[36]

Thapar presupposes the necessity of state support for monastic institutions. After
establishing the existence of monastic institutions, she takes her own presupposition
as a proof of the existence of "at least the rudiments of the state." Thapar is, however,
sensitive to the limitations of such an analysis of the state in ancient India. She claims
that even once formed the State is not "a unitary, monolithic, centralized state to begin
with, nor do the earlier forms disappear."[37] But in the statement quoted earlier, she
considers this very "concentration of power" as the principal characteristic
distinguishing the state from the previous political organizing principle. If the state is
not a centralized one then what is it that distinguishes it from a lineage system? In an
attempt to deal with this lack of clarity, Thapar concludes by calling for a number of
different types of states:

> As a continuing historical process state formation requires an analysis
> not merely of the transition from non-state to state but also the
> typologies of states as they take form under varying circumstances.[38]

We can, thus, summarize this position in the following way. A change is registered in
the way of life of the people of the Ganga valley in the mid-first millennium B.C. This

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[36] Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, 392.

[37] Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, 393.

[38] Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, 393.

change is automatically perceived as a transition from non-state or lineage systems to
state societies. But there is no clear account of what a state is. It appears that all large
organized political systems are states. Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph, similarly, point
out that the sovereign in the 'empires of South Asia' (which they describe as political
communities of "ordered heterogeneity") built upon the symbols of the classical idea
of a universal ruler. Akbar had restored the Hindu idea of a *cakravartīn* in the Persian
idea of *śahanśāh*; the British continued using Mughal ceremonies and language to re-
vitalize the imperial state (which already existed).[39]

We shall undertake a broader critique of the identification of all political
organizations as nation-state, nations or states in the next chapter. Here I only wish to
note that, while the terms nation, state and democracy are used fairly consistently by
this group, the criteria and range of the terms are fuzzy. The evaluative force,
nevertheless, remains strong.[40]

A similar pattern can be observed in the use of the term democracy to describe
ancient Indian societies. In this characterization, any social structures or processes
that seem desirable from the modern point of view—especially if they allowed the
participation of a large body of the community's members—are seen as democracy in
action. C. N. Zutshi:

> There is not a single political theory or institution adopted by European
> countries which had not been anticipated in ancient India. Rather,

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[39] Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967 & 1968).

[40] In the introduction we discussed what happens to terms when they undergo a meaning change. Skinner suggests that the evaluative force of terms that acquire a new meaning, over time or in another context, diminishes. However, as we observed in the instance of words such as 'secularism,' when used in the Indian context, it is only the evaluative force of the term that is retained in the new context.

>European nations have modeled politics on the basic theories furnished by India.[41]

Much of the writing that aims to ascribe indigenous origins to contemporary concepts was undertaken in the nationalist period. While a similar position may be found in the present day, it is usually an extremely anachronistic and frivolous argument.[42] During the national movement an argument of this kind strove to create a feeling of national unity and pride. Its claims of finding nation, state and democracy in the pages of ancient Indian civilization should be read in this light. Further this set of writers attempted to communicate with a foreign people (the colonizers) in their own language. This project is a kind of 'writing back' by the colonized people. Bill Ashcroft et al describe this 'writing back' as an enterprise that:

>by failing to alter the terms of the discourse within which it operates, has participated implicitly or even explicitly in a discourse ultimately controlled by the very imperial power its nationalist assertion is designed to exclude. Emphasis may have been transferred to the national literature but the theoretical assumptions, critical perspectives, and value judgments made have often replicated those of the British establishment.[43]

The writings within this group not only fail to "alter the terms of the discourse," but also employ terms that possess no concept.

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[41] C. N. Zutshi quoted in Norman Palmer, "Indian and Western Political Thought: Coalescence or Clash?," *The American Political Science Review* 49, no. 3 (Sep. 1955): 750.

[42] Extreme examples of such a position would claim that all modern scientific knowledge was anticipated or available in ancient India—that the weapons described in the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyana* were actually forerunners of modern atom bombs, or that test tube babies were delivered by Gandhari (which would explain her hundred children).

[43] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 17.

'Not Yet' Theorists[44]

> The political system is still in the making.[45]
>
> Iqbal Narain, "Democratic Politics and Political Development in India"
>
> The national movement recognized early on that the process of nation-formation in India was a recent one. In other words, India was a *nation-in-the-making*.[46]
>
> Bipin Chandra, *India after Independence: 1947-2000*
>
> Indian society is essentially apolitical but there is a growing politicization of traditional sub-centers.[47]
>
> Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*

The second group of theorists can largely be identified by a 'not yet' element in their explication of Indian politics. This group takes as categories of understanding/explanation that which Indian politics is 'not yet.' Thus nation, state, citizen, democracy and so forth are categories that are able to illuminate Indian politics and, at the same time, they are entities that have 'not yet' been installed completely in India. While some theorists present arguments for why they have not

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[44] The phrase 'not yet' has already been made famous by Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*. He writes: "Historicism—and even the modern, European idea of history—one might say, came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody's way of saying 'not yet' to somebody else." In the context of the liberal European understanding of history as a teleological progression from barbarism or primitivism to civilization and political maturity, Chakrabarty refers to "the waiting room of history" in which India has been asked to wait by the imperial administrators in a state of 'not yet' arrived-ness in terms of political self-rule. Whereas "the nationalists and anti-colonialists… repudiated this imagination of time in the twentieth century in asking for self-rule to be granted right away, without a period of waiting or preparation, without delay, 'now.' What replaced the structure of the 'not yet' in their imagination was the horizon of the 'now.'" Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Subaltern History as Political Thought," in *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations*, ed. V. R. Mehta and Thomas Pantham, *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006), 98. I differ slightly in the use of the phrase. I do not use it to refer to a stage in historical *telos*, but rather as constitutive of incompleteness of the project of modernity. Thus, unlike Chakrabarty, I characterize some of the nationalists and contemporary modernizers also as 'not yet' theorists.

[45] Iqbal Narain, "Democratic Politics and Political Development in India," *Asian Survey* 10, no. 2 (Feb. 1970): 88.

[46] Bipin Chandra et al., *India after Independence: 1947-2000* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999), 27.

[47] Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), 46.

yet been installed, others in fact claim that this is the way in which Indian politics

functions—always just short of having a democracy, a state, a nation and so on.

One of the reasons given for India's incomplete democratization is its social

fabric. India's religiosity, superstition, caste system, illiteracy, poverty and lack of a

general civic sense are among the elements that form a constant and continuing

hindrance to its becoming a nation, state or democracy, and its people becoming

citizens. Jawaharlal Nehru writes:

> India must therefore lessen her religiosity and turn to science. She must get rid
> of the exclusiveness in thought and social habit which has become like a
> prison to her, stunting her spirit and preventing growth…. Caste is the symbol
> and embodiment of this exclusiveness among the Hindus…. Caste has in the
> past not only led to the suppression of certain groups, but to a separation of
> theoretical and scholastic learning from craftsmanship, and a divorce of
> philosophy from actual life and its problems…. *This outlook has to change
> completely, for it is wholly opposed to modern conditions and the democratic
> ideal* (emphasis added).[48]

B. R. Ambedkar concurs with Nehru and is more scathing in his condemnation of

India's social structure. In the course of the Constituent Assembly debates, he

dismisses Indian society:

> Democracy in India is only a top dressing on Indian soil, which is
> essentially undemocratic.[49]

In a speech delivered in 1952, Ambedkar lays down conditions necessary for

democracy, which include "no glaring inequalities in the society [sic],… the

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[48] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 19th ed. (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund/ Oxford University Press, 1999), 520.

[49] P.N. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the 'Emergency', and Indian Democracy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 226.

functioning of a moral order in society… and a public conscience,"[50] each of which

Indian society does not seem to possess. He therefore urges people to "take some very

positive steps in order to remove some of the stones and boulders which are lying in

our path in order to make our democracy safe."[51] Ambedkar even suggests the need

for a period of autocratic rule so that preconditions can be created for democracy to

take root.

> [H]aving regard to the present-day conditions in India, Democracy is a
> most unsuitable system of Government. At any rate, for some time
> India needs the strong hand of an enlightened autocrat.
>
> In this country we have Democracy, but it is a Democracy which has
> ceased to exercise its intelligence… *the Indian people are by tradition
> men who have more faith and less wit.* Anyone who does anything out
> of the ordinary, does something so eccentric as to be called in other
> countries an insane person, acquires in the country the status of a
> Mahatma or Yogi. And people follow him as the sheep follow the
> shepherd… (emphasis added).[52]

For both Nehru and Ambedkar, though they came from different ideological

positions, democracy was an ideal to be pursued by the nation-state. The nation-state

too would only be formally installed at the moment of Independence. It still needed to

be made. As Uday Singh Mehta points out:

> The terms in which new states conceived freedom, once independence
> was secured, made its affirmation a most capacious *project* and a
> *promissory note*… It professed an agenda in which one could not, at
> any given point, securely anchor the sentiment and singularity of
> national being on which the nationalist struggle had wagered so much.

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[50] B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution*, ed. M. L. Kasare Hari Narke, N. G. Kamble, Ashok Godghate, vol. 17, part 3, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Mumbai: Higher Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2003), 484-485.

[51] Ambedkar, *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution*, 475-486.

[52] Ambedkar, *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution*, 168-169.

> The nation and its freedom, following independence, was a project for the future.[53]

Thus neither democracy nor the nation were indeed *existing* in India. They were 'projects' for what Mehta calls the 'new states.' The deliverance of nation and democracy rested on making citizens out of the members-to-be of the nation. Unlike the French revolution, where the people gave themselves citizenship by conflating the private man and the public citizen, in India citizens had to be cultivated. Citizenship was conferred upon the individual "not because he or she [was] 'ready' or 'educated' or 'free' from sedimented parochial social identities—as classical liberal theory would have required"[54] but because citizenship again, like the nation, becomes a proposed identity, an identity that one should want to acquire, an identification that appears attractive and desirable and not what one *actually is*. The identity of the citizen, moreover, required a complete effacement of what was understood as the identity of the Indian person.[55]

In complete contrast to the writers of the first group, the writers of the second group see everything wrong with the fabric of India.[56] For the late nationalists who

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[53] Uday Singh Mehta, "Indian Constitutionalism: The Articulation of a Political Vision," in *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition*, ed. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17.

[54] Mehta, "Indian Constitutionalism: The Articulation of a Political Vision," 18

[55] The understanding of what is an Indian identity is fraught with overtones of Orientalism, but here I will not again pause to illustrate the similarities between the Orientalist descriptions of the Indian person and the understanding presented by the 'not yet' theorists.

[56] The Indian social fabric is characterized by a marked 'absence' or a 'lack.' Reading the 'elite' narratives of the Indian nation, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes: "Within this narrative shared between imperialist and nationalist imaginations, the 'Indian' was always a figure of lack. There was always, in other words, room in this story for characters who embodied, on behalf of the native, the theme of 'inadequacy' or 'failure.'" Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks For "Indian" Pasts," *Representations* (Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories), no. 37 (Winter 1992): 6. Elsewhere Chakrabarty asks why Sumit Sarkar, one of "our most capable and knowledgeable historians" also characterizes the project of Indian history as inadequate

were writing around the time of independence, not only did India not have a democratic political tradition, but the tradition that it had was making it difficult or, in moments of despondency, impossible for installing democracy. While history afforded the writers of the first group material to make claims about the existence of an indigenous nation, state and democracy,[57] history became for Nehru and Ambedkar, as well as for one strand of social reformers, a millstone around the neck of the new nation-state.

Mehta argues that the liberal conception of history as progress assigned to India a place of 'not yet arrived' state of historical maturation. For the liberals "because Indians have not reached a point at which they know how to consent or govern themselves, they cannot know…the absence of self-government."[58] India had thus to wait, to reach a historical adulthood, before claiming for itself a nation or citizenship.

While this model, what Dipesh Chakravarty calls the 'waiting room' version of history, was a liberal model, it was also accepted by the nationalists. According to Mehta, however, while the nationalists accepted the liberal model, they did not think they had to wait longer. They felt that "India was in fact ready, that it had paid its debt on behalf of a 'backward' past through two centuries of tutelage."[59] But as our discussion makes it clear, like the liberals, the nationalists too seem to see India at a

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and incomplete. "The answer," says Chakrabarty, "is not far to seek. It is because Sarkar looks on history as the story of a perpetual struggle between the forces of reason and humanism, on the one side and those of emotion and faith, on the other." Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 24.

[57] It is no coincidence that most of the writers of the first group were historians.

[58] Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: India in British Liberal Thought* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111.

[59] Mehta, "Indian Constitutionalism: The Articulation of a Political Vision," 25.

not-yet arrived stage. India needed to be educated, civilized, modernized and

industrialized before it would be truly democratic. The project of eradicating caste

injustice, for example, was, as Mehta explains, similar to the task of building

industries or dams. To emancipate and modernize it, India was granted freedom.

Mehta, however, claims that the nationalists believed that India was ready for

democracy, and democratic politics had the power to transform Indian society. This

he deduces from the fact that a nation was indeed claimed and the constitution

asserted that the nation was a democratic one, and that all its members were citizens.

But is the setting up of a nation or the becoming of citizens an illocutionary act? Can

the nation and citizen come into being once they are so declared by the constitution?

Moreover, what was this democracy that on the one hand needed a conducive

environment to flourish and on the other hand would itself make that environment

possible? Here one can see the strong appraisive force of the term 'democracy' at

work. As to what concept it embodies there is as yet no clarity.

It seems then that the concept of democracy that Nehru or Ambedkar speak of is

a liberal one, directly imported from Western political philosophy. This proposition

needs to be further examined. Liberal theory, exemplified by Orientalist writings as

well as by more focused policy documents by the colonial administrators, functions

on 'universalist' precepts. That is to say, all men are equal, equally free and should

have an equal right to participate (irrespective of caste, creed, race or gender) in

consensual politics, namely democracy. The Indian constitution does indeed adopt

this secular dictate. Liberal universalism, however, has a warning in fine print. John

Locke, the exemplary liberalist, considers atheists as exempt from 'toleration.'[60]

Further he excludes from consensual government, lunatics, idiots and children.[61] Thus

to be part of secular democratic politics, it is necessary to be a rational, religious

(within a private domain) adult. The rationality, religiosity and adulthood of India and

its inhabitants were, to the Orientalists and colonialists, suspect. India was thus,

within the liberal democratic theory, excluded from the folds of consensual

government.[62] The liberal model that the Indian constitutionalists invoke cannot be

the Western liberal model. Not only is the model of democracy that was supposed to

supplant the traditional Indian society opaque, but the understanding of Indian society

is also obfuscated. Having remarkable similarities with the Oriental/colonial

descriptions of India, there is a discomfort expressed in presenting Indian society

exactly as the Oriental scholars had. Nehru expresses his unease about his 'discovery

of India' thus:

> India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively
> thrilled me. And yet I approached her as almost as an alien critic, full
> of dislike for the present as well as for many of the relics of the past
> that I saw. *To some extent I came to her via the West,* and looked at her
> as a friendly westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to
> change her outlook and appearance and give her *the garb of modernity*.

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[60] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1978). Explaining the exclusion of atheists, Locke writes: "Lastly, those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants and oaths which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though even in thought, dissolves all; besides also, those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion can have no pretence of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration." It may also be interesting to note the basis of the toleration principle. Locke writes: "The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in a clear light."

[61] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[62] In his *Liberalism and Empire: India in British Liberal Thought*, Mehta proposes that it was the grand liberal tradition that not only justified the project of colonialism but also made it possible and imaginable. Thus colonialism, far from being a contradiction to the liberal ideology, was necessitated by it.

> And yet doubts arose within me. Did I know India?—I who presumed
> to scrap much of her past heritage (emphasis added)?[63]

The discomfort that Nehru articulates diminishes with time and within a few years

social scientists are able to speak of the Indian nation, its democratic government and

its citizens as facts that have been 'found' by their previous thinkers. Thus Myron

Weiner is able to

> examine some of the major long-term political problems with which
> Indians…must deal if the adjustment is to be made from a colonial
> country to an independent democracy, from a feudal 'traditional'
> society to a nation caught up with the twentieth century.[64]

The Indian nation-state, democracy and citizenry, which the nationalists recognized

were only formally installed entities, become, for later political theorists, the *facts* of

Indian politics. Analysis and explanation of Indian politics thereon proceeds by

voicing dissatisfaction on two broad issues: the traditional social structure of India

and the governing body of the newly installed nation state and its policies. It is as

though the constitution of India *is*, after all, an illocutionary act that brought into

being the nation-state and made citizens out of us all by addressing us as such.

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[63] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 50. Sudipta Kaviraj has pointed out that "politicians of the Nehru type made a mistake very similar to the one that has now been, a trifle theatrically, traced through, the entire history of social science. Western social theory moved from a sort of high orientalism practiced by Marx and Weber to a very inadequate theory of modernization worked out by Parsonian developmentalists…" Sudipta Kaviraj, "On State, Society and Discourse in India," in *Rethinking Third World Politics*, ed. James Manor (London: New York, 1991), 94.

[64] Myron Weiner, "India's Political Problems: The Longer View," *The Western Political Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Jun., 1956): 283.

Down with the Government

Writing as early as 1969, only two decades after the Indian nation state in its democratic avatar was formally installed, Rajni Kothari speaks of how an elitist and centralized government is preventing this large pluralist nation from becoming truly democratic. Atul Kohli, in a more recent compilation of essays, illustrates Kothari's dissatisfactions with Indian democracy with examples such as Indira Gandhi's declaration of an extended emergency and her move towards the politicization of the judiciary and the encouraging of 'communal' disturbances. He sees Rajiv Gandhi's drive towards bringing technological advancement to a country that 'still lives in her villages' as evidence of an elitist and un-participatory ruling body.[65] In more contemporary writings, the election of (fundamentalist) Hindutva governments is among the phenomena seen as signs of the declining state of Indian democracy. The clearest symptoms of the as yet undemocratic nature of India, as seen by contemporary political theorists, are the corrupt and elitist bodies that have been governing the country for the several decades that have passed since Independence: the very institutions that are said to have been installed by the nationalists and which the contemporary theorist treats as facts of Indian democracy.

Though the charge of elitism and corruption seems to be an uncomplicated accusation, even a brief examination of this allegation would demonstrate its tenuousness. When the government is criticized as a corrupt one, it presumably implies that the government is dishonest or lacking in integrity and not one that is immoral or debased. The integrity that is expected is undoubtedly towards the

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[65]Atul Kohli, ed., *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1991).

established principles on which the government is set up. However the principles of

the government are critiqued as being elitist!

Hope lies, according to this group of theorists, in the proliferation of non-

governmental groups and increased public participation that is being witnessed today.

In a more recent essay, Kothari claims that active participation at the grassroots level

is the only way in which Indian democracy can sustain itself:

> The fundamental democratic challenge that faces this country, namely the
> challenge of making democracy an instrument of the oppressed and the
> victims of history… is a challenge that straddles the canvas of not just the state
> but also of civil society, the cultural and intellectual terrain, the large
> voluntary base of this civilization… the women, the peasantry, the workers
> and toilers who inhabit slums, forests and thoroughfares.[66]

Underlying this perspective is the hope that through greater public participation at the

grassroots, a new community of citizens (which doesn't yet exist) will emerge to give

voice to the concerns of the ordinary Indian.

The Garb of Modernity

For contemporary political theorists of the 'not yet' group, one of the main reasons for

the failure of democratic politics in India (as evidenced by the corruption described

above) is that even decades after a democratic nation-state was formally constituted,

the hopes of the nation-builders have been belied: India remains a traditional society

with merely superficial signs of modernity and its underlying social structure is not

too different from the society that Nehru and Ambedkar bemoaned as not conducive

to democracy. The problem with democracy in India, according to these writers, is the

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[66] Rajni Kothari, "Interpreting Indian Politics: A Personal Statement," in *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*, ed. Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 163.

Indian people: our mentality, our habits, customs and traditions, our values, our lack

of a sense of justice or civic sense—us. Pratap Bhanu Mehta asks:

> Despite having a functioning democracy for almost five decades, does
> the entire repertoire of our habits and practices outside of the sphere of
> formal politics, conduce to the formation of democratic citizens with a
> robust sense of right and wrong, a sensitive enough social conscience,
> and a minimal sense of justice?[67]

Like the nationalists before him, Mehta sees in the very fabric of India something that

troubles him, and he asks if democracy itself can reweave this fabric to make it more

suitable for its functioning:

> Can democracy itself generate new social norms that give its citizens
> some moral anchor, some intelligible and convincing sense of the
> proper scope of their rights and obligations vis-à-vis others, that carries
> some degree of conviction?[68]

What Kothari identifies as the caste system or Hinduism, Mehta condemns as a lack

of moral convictions and a shirking of one's moral responsibilities. Once constituted

as citizens by the constitution of India, the people of India have a responsibility

towards the values of democracy:

> the challenge of creating moral norms that can provide a basis for a
> decent society, the challenge of resisting an apocalyptic politics of self-
> esteem,…and the challenge of making citizens work together, to
> produce policies that they could freely accept, may turn out to be
> manifestations of one single challenge: how to create citizens bound by
> reciprocity.[69]

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[67] Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003), 30.

[68] Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy*, 26.

[69] Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy*, 35.

This sentiment is echoed by Dipankar Gupta in his book *Mistaken Modernities.* He

cites several actions, such as the throwing of stones at a cricket match, to point out the

undemocratic nature of the Indian people. He says:

> Deep down, at the gut level, we know that our society continues to be
> corrupt and really, most of us would not know what to do if it were
> otherwise…Democracy is not just about voting. We need to create a
> democratic temperament.[70]

The discontent that these theorists have with the political and social conditions in

India is a list of commonly heard complaints. These grouses with the political

situation only end up demonstrating that India is not a democratic nation; it is in fact

not even a nation in any significant sense of the word. Moreover, its members cannot

really be called citizens since, in their very essence, they lack qualities that would

make them 'citizen-like.' Further, elements that are responsible for preventing India

from being a democracy are not just minor shortcomings that can be rectified but

those that form the very fabric of Indian society. Why then do these theorists continue

to describe India as a nation, its political process as a democracy and its members as

citizens? How do they justify the assertion that India is indeed a democratic nation?

Unlike the first group, the writers of the second group admit that the nation and

democracy are not indigenous entities. Kohli writes:

> Democracy has clearly not been a 'home grown' affair in many of
> these countries, but once installed, it has found a hospitable
> environment in industrialized capitalism.[71]

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[70] Dipankar Gupta, *Mistaken Modernity: India between Worlds* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2000), 144, 49.

[71] Kohli, ed., *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*, 7.

But what exactly is this democratic nation that has been 'installed'? According to

writers such as Pratap Bhanu Mehta, rather than something that has taken root in the

culture of India, what was installed is merely a formal structure, a kind of scaffolding:

> [W]hether housed in a state that looked more traditional than it claimed
> to be or in a tradition that looked more modern than it admitted to
> being, the simple fact was that for the first time in Indian history, all
> Indians were declared to be citizens and not subjects. Whether or not
> republics have existed in ancient India, whether or not democracy had
> cultural roots in 1951, was of less concern. As citizens people would
> not only enjoy rights but exercise choice.[72]

Moreover, as Kohli puts it, this declared structure was "a 'gift' of the elite to the

masses"[73] that was given in an irresponsible manner without adequate knowledge of

the consequences. Sunil Khilnani laments:

> Most people in India had no idea of what exactly they had been given.
> Like the British Empire it supplanted, India's constitutional democracy
> was established in a fit of absentmindedness. It was neither unintended
> nor lacking in deliberation. But it was unwitting in the sense that the
> elite who introduced it was itself surprisingly insouciant about the
> potential implications of its actions.[74]

But despite the fact that the contemporary political process in India is not the

democracy that was envisioned by the 'nation-builders,' despite their inability to

describe and explain a genuine rooted 'democratization' of the Indian people, and

even though they recognize, as Gupta does, that "democracy is not just about

voting,"[75] the writers of this group persist in calling India a 'functioning democracy.'

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[72] Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy*, 8.

[73] Kohli, ed., *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*, 9.

[74] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), 34.

[75] Gupta, *Mistaken Modernity: India between Worlds*, 144, 149.

This conception of democracy is based neither on the understanding of the

contemporary functioning of the political situation nor is it an explicit elaboration and

application of the liberal model. The term democracy denotes (for the members of this

group) that which has been installed in India, that which India is not yet and that

which we, the not-yet citizens, have to strive towards. Moreover, according to

Kothari:

> [A] democratic polity is *supposed to be* one in which the government
> and the people together create an open and civil society—an integrated
> whole that is brought and kept together by virtue of its being open; one
> in which people participate not just in things like elections and
> development projects, but together in creating a common future
> (emphasis added).[76]

For this group, the term democracy explains, at the same time, everything! Like the

first group there is a consensus on democracy being a positive and desirable thing,

though no one really knows what it actually is. Perhaps the Indian discussion of

democracy perfectly illustrates the Žižekian argument that democracy is a 'signifier'

without a 'signified.'[77]

Democracy with a Difference

> To understand political modernity in the non-Western world is
> impossible without Western social theory; it is equally impossible
> entirely within the terms of that tradition. It is essential to formulate a
> more complex orientation towards the current resources of political
> theory to achieve that objective.[78]
>
>   Sudipta Kaviraj, "In Search of Civil Society"

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[76] Kothari, "Interpreting Indian Politics: A Personal Statement," 165.

[77] Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996).

[78] Sudipta Kaviraj, "In Search of Civil Society," in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 287.

> What colonialism changes is probably less the whole structures of
> Indian productive life, more the dominating and governing
> mechanisms and most emphatically the *imaginaire*, the way Indians
> conceived of the social word and its possibilities of organization.[79]

> Sudipta Kaviraj, *Politics in India.*

With the third group of writers, we are now caught in a situation where, on the one

hand, there is an assertion that Indian political theorization cannot proceed without

employing the concepts of Western political theory and, on the other hand, there is

recognition of the fact that the concepts of Western political theory are incongruous

with the Indian political experience. The key categories of Western political

theorization, especially nation, modernity, citizenship, secularism and democracy

cannot help us understand the experience of precolonial institutions and practices.

With colonization, however, certain formal structures did come to be installed, albeit

in an irresponsible and unmindful way. But where the second group rests its faith on

the magical powers of the colonial period and its institutions to fulfill the task, the

narrowest conception of which is the setting up of a nation-state, and the broadest

understanding of which is the instilling of liberal democratic values, the writers of this

group are more careful about attributing such a power to colonialism. And if

colonialism has not constituted a complete transformation of the structure and

institutions of India, then the language of politics also cannot be, *tout ensemble*, the

modern Western idiom. Based on his study of historians writing about ancient India,

Sudipta Kaviraj infers that the vocabulary of Western political theory cannot capture

the historical evolution of the political institutions in India. In particular,

> [a] concept which lies as an unstated premise under the very language
> of modern western political theory is the idea of sovereignty. A

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[79] Sudipta Kaviraj, ed., *Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

> language of the sovereign state, or rather a language which is practiced
> in the description of the destiny of sovereign states is inappropriate for
> the political formation which existed in traditional India.[80]

The notion of sovereignty that informs most of the concepts and discourses of

Western political theory is unintelligible in the Indian context. But the language of

sovereignty of the state also informs the destiny or the *telos* of the state; history—'the

biography of the state'—is thus deeply linked to the notion of sovereignty. Vivek

Dhareshwar, in exploring these concepts and their use in the theorization of Indian

politics states:

> History has always been a discourse of sovereignty and sovereignty
> has always been structured in a form implying the presence of a
> subject, whether we take the latter to refer to the citizen subject or to
> the collectivity named by the nation. These concepts, moreover, have
> defined the very intelligibility of 'politics,' indeed of political
> modernity itself. Other political concepts, too, derive their context and
> force from these three.[81]

While it is understandable that sovereignty, history, the citizen subject and the nation-

state form a thick network wherein each concept is necessary to provide intelligibility

to the others, why are the discourses within which these categories circulate not

replicable in India? That is to say, what prevents us from employing these categories

to explain our own political situation? While Kaviraj presents no explicit explanation

for the discord between sovereignty, its distributary discourses and the Indian political

experience, Dipesh Chakrabarty attempts to locate the problem in 'history' as an

(Western) exercise of relating to the past. In writing the history (or histories) of India,

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[80] Kaviraj, ed., *Politics in India,* 11.

[81] Vivek Dhareshwar, "Politics and History after Sovereignty," in *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, and R. Sudharshan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 401-402.

Chakrabarty shrewdly observes that what we are actually doing is writing "variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe.'"[82] Since in the colonial period (with the reformist, missionary and nationalist movements) the Indian person was both the subject and object of modernity, the categories within which politics was conducted were essentially European. The mode of conducting the modernizing project (of writing history, of setting up a nation-state, of becoming citizens and so on) was thus, Chakrabarty explains, using Homi Bhabha's words, merely a "mimetic" one. Further, it is only the elite (read nationalists or modernists) in the postcolonial context who, according to Ashis Nandy, are eager to write histories. "They sense that the dominant ideology of the state and their own privileged access to the state apparatus are both sanctioned by the idea of history."[83] Nandy goes on to elaborate that the elite recognize that only if their past is "packaged as history" can they be part of the process of politics. History is thus less of a relationship with the past and more an act of mimicry performed to get oneself qualified for the game of politics.

This subject of history, desiring a place in politics, bungles the basic rules of the game. He wishes to be a citizen, but he cannot demarcate the private and the public. We see in nineteenth century India the rise of novels, biographies, autobiographies and histories as well as a legal discourse and the institution of private property—all pointing to the coming of age of the private man who could now become the citizen. But this narrative of the interiorized private man, we may note from Chakrabarty's example of the autobiographies of Nirad Chaudhuri and Ramabai Ranade, cannot be

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[82] Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks For "Indian" Pasts," 1.

[83] Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," 45.

written without ignoring a number of serious anomalies. The 'private' was not

understood even by the elite who tried to write autobiographies![84] And yet such a

narrative, with all its subterfuge, is being written. And thus we are able to speak of a

nationalist movement and a nation-state. In his celebrated book, *Nationalist Thought

and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, Partha Chatterjee explains, through

three significant "moments," the coming into being of an elite nation-state modeled

on the modernist conception of the nation-state made available by the West. In a later

work, Chatterjee argues that this nation-state is fashioned out of the 'fuzzy

communities'[85] that existed earlier. At the "moment of departure" or inception of

what is commonly referred to as the nationalist movement, one finds a patriotic

sentiment articulated within "the framework of knowledge imposed upon it by

colonialism [which leads] inevitably to an elitism of the intelligentsia."[86] This is

perhaps why Chatterjee critiques the discourse of nationalism as a derivative

discourse. Similarly, in sharp disagreement with Benedict Anderson's modular

nationalism,[87] Chatterjee writes:

> I have one central objection to Anderson's argument. If nationalisms in
> the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from
> certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and
> the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would
> seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world, shall only be
> perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only
> true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf, not only the

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[84] Chakrabarty explains that the Indian autobiographies are extremely 'public' in the case of men and all about the extended family in case of women. Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks For "Indian" Pasts," 9.

[85] See Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony," in *Politics in India*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[86] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 79.

[87] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our
anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations
must remain forever colonized.[88]

Whether our imagination continues to remain colonized or not, the discourse of the

nation in the hands of the modernist elite "arrives" at a completion in the setting up of

a nation-state; the nation constituted into state ideology, the nationalist imagination

appropriated by the power of the state. This "moment of arrival" represented by

Nehru (nationalism, socialism, modernity and all) is characterized as a "passive

revolution." The nationalist movement, set up by the elite in an act of mimicry of

Western nationalism, distorted into a dreamlike utopia, attempts to transform the

existing "peasant consciousness" into "rationalist forms of an 'enlightened' nationalist

politics."[89] In the face of the failure of a complete transformation, there is an

appropriation of the peasant support—the "moment of maneuver" or the Gandhian

intervention. In the final moment of arrival, Indian nationalism, represented by Nehru,

is established by 'civil society.' The modern nation is, however, a compromised one,

established by negotiating with the feudal centers of power. Deploying an explanatory

scheme borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, Chatterjee characterizes the product as the

result of a passive revolution. Within the traditional Marxist understanding of the

dynamic progression of history, each stage of production replaces the previous stage

and thus history progresses through various stages of production relations. The

transition of each stage is marked by a revolution to be led by a particular class. The

transition from the feudal society to the capitalist economy is to be assisted by the

upholders of the capitalist society, namely, the bourgeoisie. In explaining the

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[88] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.

[89] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, 81.

contemporary situation in Italy, Gramsci recognizes that the bourgeoisie has failed in

its function to lead the revolution to a complete capitalist mode of production. In

installing the state and transforming the economy the bourgeoisie has compromised

with certain pre-capitalist (or pre modern) identities. The revolution is thus, in some

ways, failed and this failed revolution Gramsci calls 'passive revolution.'

> The concept of 'passive revolution' must be rigorously derived from
> two fundamental principles…: 1. That no social formation disappears
> as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still
> find room for further forward movement. ; 2. That a society does not
> set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not
> already been incubated, etc.[90]

The Gramscian 'passive revolution' was meant both as an explanation and a criticism

of the bourgeois revolution. The passive revolution denotes a revolution that has

failed. The bourgeoisie failed in completing the revolution because it compromised

with feudal structures. However, Chatterjee does not reckon that the passive

revolution has completely succeeded! In fact, he argues that the passive revolution

may have failed! *The failure of the failed revolution* may be sought in the marks of the

struggle that are present in the narrative of the nation. These marks have to be noticed

and the narratives of struggle have to be unearthed. Till now "…much has been

suppressed in the historical creation of post colonial nation-states, much has been

erased or glossed over."[91] On unearthing the narratives of the nationalist struggle we

discover that the heroes of the national movement are not the elite modernizers but the

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[90] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed., Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1996), 106.

[91] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, 170.

members of an "unorganized subaltern domain,"[92] or what Chatterjee later calls, "the

political society."[93] The relationship between the nation and most of its members in

the Indian context thus has not been rendered on lines similar to the relationship of the

European nation-state to its citizens, who are part of civil society. In fact

> [m]ost of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even
> ambiguously and contextually, rights bearing citizens in the sense
> imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members
> of civil society and are not regarded as such by the *institutions of the
> state*.[94]

Most of the members of the nation-state thus relate to the state not as citizens, but are

treated by the state as 'population groups.' They are the recipients of welfare schemes

and education and the target of policies and disciplinary measures. We may thus infer

that the nation, as imagined by the bourgeoisie, has thus not been put into place, since

those who are to constitute the nation-state themselves are not constituted by it. Or

rather we could say that what has been put into place, transformed, modeled or come

into being in a fit of absentmindedness is not a nation, contrary to the imagination of

the elite, but rather something else, the workings of which are evident in the politics

of the political society.

Chatterjee provides ample evidence of what Dhareshwar calls the "unworking" of

the concepts of modern Western political language.[95] Similarly Kaviraj, Nandy,

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[92] Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 39.

[93] Partha Chatterjee, "On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies," in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[94] Partha Chatterjee, "Modernity, Democracy and the Political Negotiation of Death," *South Asia Research* 19, no. 1 (1999): 108.

[95] Dhareshwar, "Politics and History after Sovereignty," 419.

Chakrabarty and Dhareshwar have all put forth powerful theses for the failure of the

language of the Western political idiom. Why then do they negate their own insights

and continue understanding and explaining Indian political processes and institutions

in the same language; a language that they find not just incongruous with Indian

political experience but also elitist, colonized, and 'undemocratic'? Chatterjee prefers

to retain in his theoretical armory the term 'civil society,' in its classical sense, to

refer to

> those characteristic institutions of modern associational life originating
> in Western societies which are based on equality, autonomy, freedom
> of entry and exit, contract, deliberative procedures of decision-making,
> recognized rights and duties of members, and other such principles.[96]

In India, civil society was produced in an act of farcical mimicry[97] by the nationalist

elite.[98] In imitating the Western discourses, the universal narratives of history, the

nation-state and citizenship were *made* "provincial" (again inadvertently) by the

Indian subject. In this "provincializing of 'Europe,'" according to Chakrabarty, one

may find the possibility of *actual* politics in India.[99] But how can one become that

which one is imitating? In the process of mimicry does one actually become what one

is only imitating? For Chatterjee civil society in India was created through a passive

revolution by a strange bourgeois state. The compromised bourgeois state was not

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[96] Chatterjee, "On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies," 172.

[97] What Homi Bhabha calls 'mimicry,' Kaviraj refers to as 're-enactment.' Citing Naoroji and Nehru, Kaviraj argues that the political form in India was a re-enactment, in Naoroji's case, of laissez-faire capitalism, and with Nehru, the socialist model of democracy. Kaviraj, "On State, Society and Discourse in India," 83.

[98] For unsubtle examples of this farcical mimicry see accounts of Dadabhai Naoroji in Chatterjee, "Modernity, Democracy and the Political Negotiation of Death." Raja Ram Mohun Roy, it is said, had two houses; one in which everything was decorated according to English (Victorian) decor and the other one where his family lived and where everything (except perhaps Ram Mohun Roy) was Indian.

[99] Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks For "Indian" Pasts."

rooted in civil society since it is the nation-state that created civil society. However

Chatterjee also claims that the passive revolution was not completed; that is to say,

the failed revolution had also failed. He admits that the concept of civil society

excludes "from its scope the vast mass of population"[100] and yet he claims that "civil

society as an ideal continues to energize an interventionist political project, but as an

actually existing form it is demographically limited."[101] But where does Chatterjee see

the force of this 'ideal'? Since the process that he characterizes as the passive

revolution has failed, civil society could not have taken root in India. It is only if the

revolution had failed and the passive revolution had succeeded, that there could be the

possibility of a compromised civil society. Why do we want to continue asserting that

we need to retain the blueprint of a project of modernity that has not even taken off in

any significant way?

While Ashis Nandy recognizes that "millions of people still live outside

'history,'" he still claims that "the politically powerful now live in and with

history."[102] How do they come to live within history, especially when the evidence of

their move to the 'empire of history' as well as their practices of history are both, to

say the least, questionable? Dhareshwar admits that "unless one is committed to a

certain historicism," [103] the language of modernity appears to generate, in the Indian

context, a "polysemy":[104]

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[100] Chatterjee, "On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies," 172.

[101] Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 39.

[102] Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," 44, 46.

[103] Nandy explains this historicism by stating that "history cannot be done without ordering its data in terms of something like a theme of return (invoking the idea of cultural continuity or recovery), progress (invoking the principle of massive, sometimes coercive, irreversible intervention in society) or

> The coherence of our identity and politics was achieved by the modernist interpretation of modernity: the belief in progress and the confidence that reason would organize and order our cultural and social world, and the belief that true universality would be achieved when all human practices could be brought under the rule of reason.[105]

Thus, now that we find the 'modernist interpretation of modernity' unintelligible, we are left with a polysemy from which we can only derive the appraisive force of our politics. Because to *reject modernity* itself is "an absurd project, historically and conceptually…. 'We' are modern. The state and sovereignty are as much an Indian thing as say, caste."[106] The rejection of modernity is, strangely, seen as 'too radical.' Kaviraj, for instance, characterizes Gandhi's position in this way:

> Gandhi did not seek an answer to the problems of the modern condition. He shrewdly refused to deal in modernity's terms…. In a sense he embraced a *deliberate obsolescence*. His critique of modernity is of course powerful and lucid, but *too radical*, for he offers not an alternative solution to modernity's problems, but to modernity itself.[107]

Since the project of modernity is itself incoherent, I contend that the issue is not the radicalness of the stance, but rather that it is necessary to explore an alternative to modernity. However, before we can even make sense of any alternative, we need to dismantle the concepts of modernity that make any alternative to modernity seem like an 'obsolescence.'

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stages (invoking the sense of certitude and mastery over self, as expressed in an evolutionary sequencing of it)." Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," 48.

[104] Dhareshwar, "Politics and History after Sovereignty," 419.

[105] Dhareshwar, "Politics and History after Sovereignty," 420.

[106] Dhareshwar, "Politics and History after Sovereignty," 419, 420.

[107] Kaviraj, "On State, Society and Discourse in India," 96.

I wish to conclude this chapter with two remarks that will drive the next four chapters. The first is to draw attention to the insight that Dhareshwar provides regarding the polysemic character of the concepts of modernity in the postcolonial Indian context. Let us now juxtapose this insight with Quentin Skinner's evaluation of words and concepts. Skinner argues, to briefly recapitulate, that it is only when there is no shared concept that a term acquires *polysemy*. Applying his test to writings on Indian political theory we find not only that are there no concepts in Indian political theory, but also that there is a strong evaluative force to the terms derived from Western political theory. Let us consider the hypothesis that the concepts embodied by the terms have undergone a change. That is to say, in the face of a failure of their 'correct' application in a new context (that of India) they have acquired a new meaning.[108] Skinner also states that a feature of the coming into being of a new meaning is that while the criteria of the use of the word and the range of reference are altered, the evaluative force is lost. However, in the Indian context the meaning change throws up strange upshots—the evaluative force connoted by the term is retained (perhaps with greater vigor) and the term transforms into a polysemic one. Why does this happen? Why are we not able to give meaning to the terms that we employ so consistently in our political vocabulary? As an attempt to answer this question we must first interrogate the frame which Skinner uses to establish the relationship between words and concepts. Skinner critiques Williams for a lack of clarity on what constitutes the keywords that reflect our social, political and moral concerns. He then replaces Williams's 'keywords' with the words "appraisive terms." But what constitutes appraisive terms? It is to answer this question that we will

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[108] Also see Partha Chatterjee, "Secularism and Toleration," *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 28 (Jul. 1994).

explore these keywords or appraisive terms and attempt to find out what it is that makes them (and no others) the vocabulary of Western political thought and a derivative discourse in our context.

The second remark relates to the rejection of modernity and its ramifications. The rejection of modernity, I submit, cannot be conflated with an 'obsolescence.' We would rather associate it with the unintelligibility that stems from the employment of a particular way of understanding ourselves and our institutions. The next few chapters will attempt to make sense of this rejection as an alternative, not to a politics, but to an understanding of politics. The last chapter will grapple with the necessary incoherence of one way in which we have so far tried to represent our culture. However, the possibility of there being another way available for us to reconceptualize our political experience will only emerge once the exercise of creating a new lexicon is undertaken.

Chapter 2

The State of the Nation

'Nation-state' and 'citizen' have become keywords in the theorization of Indian democracy. The presence or the lack of democracy seems to rest on these two correlatives. In the first chapter we have tried to locate the conceptual underpinnings of these terms. This exercise only led to a muddying of theoretical waters and we are still unable to point clearly to what constitute these primary entities that are supposed to house democracy in India. On reviewing three ways in which theorists have used these terms, we have found that despite their fairly consistent application, these terms display features similar to terms like 'being' and 'infinity,' that is to say, they are lexically ambiguous or polysemic.[1] But unlike words like being or infinity, the terms of Indian political discourse retain a strong evaluative or normative force.

However these terms have not always and everywhere been equivocal. It is in their journey from Western political language to the Indian context that they acquire this quality. Our search for a concept of these words must therefore begin in the Western historical experience that lends intelligibility to these terms. We need to examine the historical ontology that constitutes individuals as subjects of the nation-state, as citizens. This would entail, primarily a study of the particular historical, juridical and moral discourses of nation, state, and sovereignty within which these subjectivities are constituted. These discourses are what we recognize as theories of nation and nationalism, of the state and of the modern nation-state.

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[1] See introduction and chapter one for an elaboration of 'polysemic' terms in a discussion of Quentin Skinner's exploration of the relationship between words and concepts. Also see Quentin Skinner, *Regarding Method*, vol. 1, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation ?

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One lies in the past, the other in the present. One is the common possession of a rich legacy of memories; the other is the present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue the values of the heritage that one has received. [2]
>
> Ernest Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?"

> With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear….What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. As we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation.[3]
>
> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*

> 1. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.
>
> 2. Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non-members.[4]
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> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*

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[2] Ernest Renan, "Qu'est Ce Qu' Une Nation? (Conférence Faite En Sorbonne, Le 11 Mars 1882)," in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: 1947). (All translations unless otherwise indicated are mine) "Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel. Deux choses qui, `a vrai dire, n'en font qu'une, constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs ; l'autre est la consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer a faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis."

[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 11.

[4] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

Both the discourse of nationalism and the nation as an entity are ubiquitous. This

leads us to think that there is sufficient clarity on the 'idea' of the nation. Ernest

Renan begins his famous lecture, "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?" by stating the contrary.[5]

The idea of the nation is not only one which is extremely fuzzy but also one which is

particularly prone to misunderstandings, often of the most violent kind. "Nation,

nationality, nationalism," Benedict Anderson similarly claims, "all have proved

notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze. In contrast to the immense

influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, plausible theory about it

is conspicuously meager."[6] Even so, most theorists of nationalism begin with the *fact*

of the nation. That is to say, the first presupposition is that 'nations' as empirical,

knowable entities, exist; and exist everywhere. They are identifiable social

phenomena of such power and influence that they can and frequently do cause

immense damage to social life all over the world. And so, they need to be understood,

theorized, dealt with. In Anderson's words,

> [T]he nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.
> Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two
> centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as
> willingly to die for such limited imaginings.
>
> These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem
> posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent
> history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal
> sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural
> roots of nationalism.[7]

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[5] He writes: "What I propose to do today is to analyse with you an idea which, though seemingly clear, lends itself to the most dangerous misunderstandings." Renan, "Qu'est Ce Qu' Une Nation? (Conférence Faite En Sorbonne, Le 11 Mars 1882)," 1.

[6] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 3.

[7] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 7.

This task of dealing with nationalism becomes all the more critical for these theorists because prevailing social conditions across the world make the emergence and continued power of the nation—and nationalism—inevitable.

These theorists present a variety of criteria to distinguish this monstrous new entity from all the other types of communities that have existed and present a universal story of its rise and spread. In the variety of cultures and territories to which the spread of nationalism is posited, certain conditions are postulated as necessary (and even sufficient) conditions for the emergence of this new form of large and complex community. Once these conditions are found in a society, it is said, you can be quite sure that nationalism will rear its head. But even so, wide ranging differences are observed between nations and nationalisms across societies and cultures. To account for these, a typology is drawn of the various kinds of nations that can and do exist.

One of the more influential theses on the nation is that of Ernest Renan. In *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation*, Renan actually points to two distinct elements of a nation. One element is the 'present day,' or the modern discourse of the nation, that can be "asserted in an ethical, 'universalistic' spirit.'"[8] This universalism of the nation-state is the one that is elaborated in the constitutions of the nations and declared in their preambles, charters and anthems. The nation is universal in the sense that membership to it is not a privilege of a particular community, nor is it that only a certain territory can be organized into a nation. Different peoples have different nations. The French nation thus recognizes (even if grudgingly) that Germany is a nation. For the French

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[8] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 15.

and the Germans to identify themselves as separate nations, however, they would not only require to identify distinct monuments of national identity, but they would also have to trace or demarcate for themselves a unique genealogy and cultural past. This brings us to the second element that Renan refers to, that of a shared past, which has largely been seen to consist in "more permanent cultural attributes" such as memory, value, myth and symbolism[9] or to more identifiable "cultural roots…which preceded nationalism… such as *religious communities* and *dynastic realm*."[10] For Anderson, this common memory is part of what constitutes the nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[11] It is an *imagined* community because, even though members of such a community will never be able to meet or hear of most of the other members, there resides in their minds a shared image of their past, present and future. To distinguish the nation from other types of communities, Anderson claims we should look at

> the style in which they are imagined. Javanese villagers have always known that they are connected to people they have never seen, but these ties were once imagined particularistically—as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship. Until quite recently, the Javanese language had no word meaning the abstraction 'society.' We may today think of the French aristocracy of the *ancien regime* as a class; but surely it was imagined this way only very late. To the question 'Who is the Comte de X?' the normal answer would have been, not 'a member of the aristocracy,' but 'the lord of X,' 'the uncle of the Baronne de Y,' or 'a client of the Due de Z.'[12]

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[9] Anthony. D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalisms* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 27.

[10] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 19.

[11] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalisms*, 6.

[12] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalisms*, 7.

Ernest Gellner makes a different point. The common culture of a nation, according to him, is created by nationalism—"nationalism *invents* nations where they do not exist"—and the cultural heritage is at best used selectively in this process of invention and most often completely transformed— they are merely "preexisting differentiating marks [for nationalism to] work on, even if... these are purely negative."[13] The nation, according to Gellner, is that non-corporal entity which embodies the 'high culture' that was, in agrarian societies, a privilege of the elite. In a post-industrial society where members are "of ephemeral professional bureaucracies," the maintenance of high culture becomes difficult and expensive and thus becomes the duty of the state. Gellner argues that "it is the consequence of the mobility and anonymity of modern society and of the semantic non-physical nature of work, that mastery of such culture" becomes the mark of membership to the community of the nation.[14]

Both Anderson and Gellner, however, agree that the nation and nationalism are relatively new phenomena that have emerged along with particular structures and practices characteristic of modernity. Anderson stresses the role of print capitalism in permitting an unprecedented mode of apprehending time that was 'empty' and 'homogenous,' expressed in the ability to imagine the simultaneous existence of one's co-nationals. Gellner believes nationalism is an inevitable consequence of the very way of life that industrial modernity has engendered.

> [N]ationalism does seem to me explicable—*at any rate ex post*—as the inevitable, or at least the natural, corollary of certain salient and

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[13] Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), 168.

[14] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 16.

conspicuous *traits of modern or modernizing societies* (emphasis added).[15]

These traits include political centralization, economic specialization, occupational mobility, high level of technology, the prevalence of varying degrees of socialism, and an inherent tendency towards a fair measure of equality. In this scheme, as Anthony Smith points out, "The genealogy of the nation is located in the requirements of modernity, not the heritage of pre-modern pasts."[16] This allows Gellner to limit nationalism in time at the point of the birth of industrial modernity, but spread it in space at modernity's diffusion. Nationalism is a coeval of modernity and also, presumably, a 'co-evil' in their travel through cultural space.

Similarly, for Anderson, the creation of the nation as a particular type of cultural artifact is the result of specific historical conditions and influences—those that existed in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century—but once this type of artifact has come into being, it spreads far and wide, taking root in cultures and societies very different from the one of its birth.

> [T]he creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became 'modular,' capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.[17]

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[15] Ernest Gellner, "Nationalism," *Theory and Society* 10, no. 6 (Nov. 1981): 753.

[16] Anthony. D. Smith, "Memory and Modernity: Reflections on Ernest Gellner's Theory of Nationalism," *The Ernest Gellner Memorial Lecture,* European Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, http://members.tripod.com/gellnerpage/smithlec.html.

[17] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 4.

These stories of the origin and spread of nationalism acquire a universalist character,

in which the nation is presented as a set of social structures—as a cultural artifact—

that can be looked for and found wherever social life fulfils a particular set of criteria.

Underlying this universalist character of theories of nationalism is an attempt to

explicate a phenomenon, the existence of which is undisputable and unproblematic.

While the story of nationalism can be told in several ways, its existence as a

legitimate and universal category for understanding political communities in the

modern period is rarely brought into question. That is to say, theorists of nation

identify certain actions, phenomena and discourses as characteristics of nation, thus

bringing it into being as a discursive entity. Once brought into being, we see it

everywhere and explain the occurrence of a variety of phenomena as a result of

nationalism.

Such a characterization of the nation lends it to be cast in various binaries. This

dual movement has been articulated alternately as 'tradition and modernity,' or

'material and spiritual,'[18] '*societas* and *universitas*,'[19] ethnic and universal, and so on.

Anderson explores these binaries as three paradoxes of the nation. He writes:

> Theorists of nationalism have often been perplexed, not to say irritated,
> by these three paradoxes: (1) The objective modernity of nations to the
> historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.
> (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—
> in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as
> he or she 'has' a gender—vs. the irremediable particularity of its
> concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, 'Greek' nationality is

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[18] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[19] Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1962).

sui generis. (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence.[20]

The first two paradoxes that Anderson lists point to an interesting critique, inadvertently though that may be, of the theories of nationalism. As a historian/theoretician, Anderson distances himself from the nationalists' sentiment; despite their claims that the nation has existed since antiquity, it is in fact very modern. Unlike the nationalists' desire to project nationalism back into time, the modern historian is able to account for the processes by which the monuments of antiquity are projected as national treasures. The historian/theorist recognizes the modernity of the concept 'nation' but does not consider its cultural intelligibility. Anderson recognizes that the idea of the nation is bound to the concept of sovereignty:

> It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living *pluralism* of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith's ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.[21]

The nation was created, invented and imagined along a particular historical axis—that of sovereignty. Would it not require a transposition of cultural experience for this nation to spread to other cultures with a different trajectory of political ontology?

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[20] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 5.

[21] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalisms*, 7.

The nation, not only imagines/invents itself on a common past, it also gives itself

a common destiny. What Renan calls the "will to continue the values of the heritage

which one has received," Anderson explains as an essential foundation of the nation.

> The Nation was the first historical polity for which the Future was an
> essential foundation. Moving onward through Walter Benjamin's
> 'empty, homogeneous time,' it was not headed for the Day of
> Judgment, and it knew it had no place in Heaven or in Hell. So it
> thought, and continues to think, about future Frenchmen and future
> Americans, who in their uncountable numbers stand lining up in
> Limbo for their entrance onto the national territory.[22]

Can this secularized eschatology of the nation be shared by non-Western, non-

Christian traditions? Can the East have its own nation? The theorists of the nation

answer in the affirmative, but the nation of the East is a different one. It is one that is

explained by Anderson as 'modular nationalism.' Gellner, in a discussion of John

Plamenatz's typology of nationalisms, presents a distinction between Western

nationalism and non-Western nationalisms. Western nationalism is exemplified by

"the Italians and Germans in the nineteenth century: possessed of a perfectly viable

culture, and generally the equals of those to whom they oppose…."[23] In contrast

> 'Eastern' nationalisms, found in Eastern Europe and in the rest of the
> world, were doomed to a certain authoritarianism by the very
> arduousness of the cultural engineering which they were obliged to
> undertake. The former merely needed to create a state machine to
> cover, protect, and perpetuate viable existing culture; the latter had to
> *acquire a state and then, with its authority, create and impose what is*

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[22] Benedict Anderson, "To What Can Late Eighteenth-Century French, British, and American Anxieties Be Compared? Comment on Three Papers," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (Oct., 2001): 1287.

[23] Gellner, "Nationalism," 774.

in effect a new culture, however much it claims merely to be the fulfillment or completion of old yearnings.[24]

Whether the East acquired for itself a Western culture, a Western past and an imagination of the future made possible only with the narrative of sovereignty needs to be examined, not just in the light of the postcolonial critique of the nation, but also with a genealogical critique of the theories of nationalism.

The Social Contract State

> [T]he essence of the commonwealth…is one person of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defence…he that carryeth this person is called soveraigne.[25]
>
> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*

> A state…of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident than that all creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection, unless the Lord and Master of them all…should confer on him…an undoubted right to dominion or sovereignty. [26]
>
> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning The True Original, Extent And End Of Civil Government*

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[24] Gellner, "Nationalism," 774.

25 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (London: Crooke, 1651), 24.

[26] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning The True Original, Extent And End Of Civil Government* (London: J. Churchill, 1713), 23.

> The heart of the idea of the social contract may be stated simply: Each of us places his person and authority under the supreme direction of the general will, and the group receives each individual as an indivisible part of the whole...[27]
>
> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

The discourses of the nation within Western political theory presume the existence of the state.[28] One of the most influential accounts of the state is that of social contract. The idea of social contract has, in the present day, become, not just an explanation of the formation of the state but a basis of several cogent theories of justice, law, society and organization. There are several differences amongst contractualists and these have provided sustenance to the most interesting debates between the constitutional contractualists and formal contractualists, or interest-based contractualism and rights-based contractualism. But underlying all these is the assumption of a contract —a contract upon which society, state, legal apparatus, civil society institutions and economic markets are built.

The idea of the contract is said to have been introduced in Western political discourse in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,[29] and it remains a 'motif in Western political thought'[30] albeit with several improvisations.

The three most powerful proponents of the social contract are Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. While they are often spoken of as a group

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[27] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin Classics, 1968), 13.

[28] For an elaboration, see: Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*., ," and Anthony. D. Smith, "LSE Centennial Lecture: The Resurgence of Nationalism? Myth and Memory in the Renewal of Nations," *The British Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 4 (Dec. 1996).

[29] See Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[30] See Harro Hopfl and Martyn P. Thompson, "The History of Contract as a Motif in Political Thought," *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 4 (Oct., 1979) for a detailed exposition of the idea of the 'contract' in political debates till the late seventeenth century.

and representative of the tradition of the theory of social contract, they differ mildly from each other in their exposition of the foundational principles of the state and society. Hobbes believed that men are innately violent and even potential criminals. They must have lived in a state of nature where they would have had unlimited freedom. This freedom would however be violated and impinged upon by others, and men would be living in a perpetual state of "*bellum omnium contra omnes*" (war of all against all).[31] They thus would give up their negative freedoms in favor of a more pragmatic state or a sovereign commonwealth. Locke's state of nature is a much better place than Hobbes's. While in Hobbes's state of nature, men would be full of envy and hatred, indiscriminately declaring war upon other men for their own advantage, in Locke's state of nature, men would be in "a state of perfect freedom to order their action and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit within the bounds of the law of nature."[32] To maintain the smooth running of the state of nature machinery, a law of nature is established. The execution of this law of nature, says Locke, is put into every man's hand. The government or the state set up by social contract is merely to restrain the occasional deviant amongst the otherwise good flock of men. Rousseau recognized that though there is freedom in the state of nature, "men reach a point where the obstacles to their preservation in a state of nature prove greater than the strength that each man has to preserve himself"[33] and thus a contractual government is formed from the collective individual wills. This is the sovereign or the representative/enforcer of the general will of the society. This

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[31] Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, 25.

[32] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government* (London: J. Churchill, 1713).

[33] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin Classics, 1968).

contract grants men civil liberties in lieu of the natural freedom that they had forsaken in forming the contract.

While modern contractualists do not agree with this kind of simplistic formulation of the evolution of the state, they are nevertheless in agreement with the idea of a contract. This contract is not a literal contract as it may have been for the early social contractualists. Critiquing the idea of the contract as a physical and literal contract, John Rawls writes:

> No society can . . . be a scheme of cooperation which men enter voluntarily in a literal sense; each finds himself placed at birth in some particular position in some particular society.[34]

This is, however, not a particularly incisive critique, and not a very modern one either. Locke himself questioned the idea of the literal contract:

> To this I find Objection made . . . that there are no instances to be found in Story of a Company of Men independent and equal one amongst another, that met together, and in this way began and set up a Government.[35]

Indeed it may be admitted that the contract was a purely hypothetical one, and yet one whose normative force has remained persuasive even to contemporary political theoreticians. Different and more sophisticated characterizations of the contract are undoubtedly available in modern political thought and yet the original theory of contract (not the theory of the original contract) remains the prototype for these later innovations.

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[34] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 13.

[35] John Locke, *Two Treaties of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 100.

Another crucial element of social contract theory is the idea of the sovereign. It is commonly assumed that in a monarchy the king is the sovereign and in a commonwealth it is the state that is sovereign. While this is, speaking generally, not untrue, there is a finer shade that is crucial in understanding the idea of the sovereign. On a more careful reading of Hobbes's explication of the sovereign, we notice that it is not the state that is sovereign, but the representative to the state. The state, moreover, is the name of a person in whom the collective will (as Rousseau explains) resides. And one who has been authorized by the collective wills of the individual members that form the state is deemed sovereign. This argument for the state or the commonwealth often followed one made by apologists for the king and the divine sovereignty that he possessed.[36] Even when the state is spoken of as a sovereign,[37] it is metonymically as a person.

Despite their other differences, the contractualists are agreed on the view that there is something that we can call a 'state of nature' prior to the development of 'civilization.' The state of nature seems to have implied an actual place or condition of being for the early contractualists. This state of nature is either overtly in a state of war, or implicitly in a condition of threat of war. This war-like tendency of the state of nature can be kept in check by a civilization or a sovereign state. Corresponding with this idea of a state of nature and a civilization, is the understanding of human beings as having a natural nature and a civilized self, or an instinctive nature and a rational

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[36] See for example, J. P Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603-1640* (London: 1986)., J. W Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals: Continuity and Change in English Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)., Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols., vol. I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[37] The clearest articulation of such a position is found in Samuel Pufendorf. See Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*.

nature, and so on. It is not a coincidence that this two-level understanding of society forms the basis of the theory of state or sovereignty, since the state is also envisaged as a "compound moral person."[38] We shall see in the next chapter how this two-tiered understanding of the state that is informed by and informs the dual-nature of a person forms the basis for the understanding of citizenship.

The central premise of the contract theory is, however, a state of war or threat. This state of threat is not only invoked in speaking about the state or the commonwealth but from thereon it is mobilized in any understanding of society and community. But why is society assumed to be in a perpetual state of war? Michael Foucault asks: "When, how and why did someone come up with the idea that [society] is a sort of uninterrupted battle that shapes peace?"[39] Or to pose the question differently: what postulates facilitated the theories of social contract? What discourses did it rely on and from what previous discourses did it mark a break?

The Origin(al) Fallacy: The Universal Narrative of the Nation and the State

The story of the nation as an imagined community presupposes the existence of the category of nation and then proceeds to tell a story about it. This story is a universal story of how any community can imagine a common past once certain elements of agrarian or pre-industrial society are transformed. So, while the narrative is dependant on modernity and capitalism to complete its account, it does not explain the specific occurrence of the discourse of nation. What the story leaves unexplained is the genealogy of the discourse of nationalism, or nationhood, emphasizing in fact a

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[38] Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 4.

[39] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 47.

narrative of the evolution of the nation, as though the nation itself were an object that emerged. This story does not look at how a discourse becomes the discourse of the nation but rather it seeks to study the moment of the organization of society or a people as a nation. It is the story of the object nation rather than the discourse of nationalism. It explains the features of the nation and posits a theory of its origin. This story is a universal story, a story of all nations. The story can be embellished and refined with the specific flavors of various nationalisms. The idea of the nation remains, however, a universal one. Similarly the social contractualists have explained the coming into being of the state where human beings preferred to live together and to leave the administration to a select sovereign. This sovereign represented either the collective wills of all individuals, or was the representative of God on earth. Thus while it is not denied that the state came into being at a particular historical moment, the processes of the formation of the state are deemed as fairly universal processes, that is to say, given the human condition in a state of nature, a community existence is preferred and a *state* is formed. Thus the contractualists too begin with the existence of a state (man was born free, but is everywhere in chains) and proceeds to construct a story of its origin.

Similarly the postcolonial nation and state and the processes of their formation would have their own narrative. The narrative would attempt an explanation of the origins of nations, the formation of national communities and the organization of a national identity. This kind of story narrates the evolution of all nations, assuming that nation is a concept that is universally understandable even before an empirical nation comes into being. It thus assumes a common understanding of the idea of a nation-state that all nation-states share. Nation-states, in such a story are thus treated as

natural objects (as in the physical sciences) and not discursive entities—that is,

entities constituted by a discourse.

A Tale of Two Stories: Foucault's Account of Sovereignty

Michel Foucault's study provides a discursive frame for the narratives of the nation

and the state. He locates these narratives within the historical ontology of the West.[40]

Tracing the genealogy of these discourses, he argues that the development of the

discourse of sovereignty from the late seventeenth century to the early eighteenth

century was central to the coming into being of the discourse of nationalism. The idea

of sovereignty is crucial to the modern Western political discourse. The theory of

sovereignty "dates from the reactivation of Roman law [in the Middle Ages] and is

constituted around the problem of the monarch and monarchy."[41] It is also one

element that remains consistently present in the understanding of the idea of the

monarch, of the state, of the citizen, and of the identity group within various different

political systems and regimes in the West. With each subsequent political system, the

location of sovereignty undergoes certain shifts but its presence is nevertheless

essential to the intelligibility of Western political theory. Though the story of the

nation is deeply entwined with the discourse of sovereignty, the nation attempts to

trace its own history as a unique one, define its own origins and create itself as a

separate object of discourse. In retelling the story of sovereignty that Foucault

narrates, we may identify three manifestations of sovereignty: sovereignty as

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[40] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76.* Also see Michel Foucault, "The Culture of Self: Regents lecture of April 1983," Berkeley College, http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/audiofiles.html#foucault.

[41] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, 34.

embodied in the King, sovereignty legitimated by the truth of the past and sovereignty

manifested in individual wills backed by disciplinary mechanisms.

…Of the Monarch and the State

There was no nation in a system of monarchy, except in the body of the King. The

king was not a representative of the people but a manifestation of the will of the

people and of God. From the eleventh-twelfth century to the sixteenth century there

were several shifts in the ways in which the king was characterized.[42] The twelfth and

thirteenth centuries deified the king as Christ. In the Norman Anonymous we find:

> The power of the king is the power of God. This power, namely, is
> God's by nature, and the king's by grace. Hence the king, too, is God
> and Christ, but by grace; and whatsoever he does, he does not simply
> as a man, but as one who has become God and Christ by grace.[43]

By the late medieval period, there was a "replacement of the more christocratic-

liturgical concept of kingship by a more theocratic-juristical idea of government."[44]

The king is now more an embodiment of law than 'God by grace.' The concentration

of the king's duties is more on decreeing justice than tending his flock. In a political

tract by Aegidius Romanus titled *De Regimine Principum* we find:

> [The] king or prince is a kind of Law, and the Law is a kind of king or
> prince. For the Law is a kind of inanimate prince; the prince, however,
> a kind of animate Law.[45]

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[42] A thorough account of these shifts can be found in Ernst Kantorowicz, *The Kings Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[43] Quoted in Kantorowicz, *The Kings Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theory,* 48.

[44] Kantorowicz, *The Kings Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theory*, 93.

[45] Quoted in Kantorowicz, *The Kings Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theory*, 134

Running right through these conceptions of the king as Christ, law and state, was the

idea of king as sovereign. The monarch was the sovereign and sovereignty was of the

monarch and only of the monarch. The rituals and processes of the court maintained

the equation of monarch/sovereign by continually emphasizing and recreating the

monarch as sovereign.

> The specific operation of court ritual and court ceremonial is to make
> [the King's] love affairs sovereign, to make his food sovereign, to
> make his levee and his going-to-bed ritual sovereign.[46]

Thus, it would not be too surprising for Louis XIV to have said "L'Etat, c'est moi."[47]

Amongst the rituals of the court, or the technologies by which sovereignty of the king

was maintained, an important ritual was the writing of 'history.' The chronicles of the

state were thus the stories of the heroic exploits of the monarch written by the royal

historians of the king's court. They functioned to record the glory of the king and in

the process created and/or recreated that glory.[48] While history previously performed

a very different function, it will go through another dramatic shift in the seventeenth

and eighteenth century.[49] For now, let us remain with the idea that history was

primarily the business of maintaining the monarch's sovereignty. Along with

chronicles of the State and other rituals of sovereignty, the monarchy maintained a

firm hold on the knowledge of administration. This knowledge contributed in making,

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[46] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, 175-76.

[47] Though there is no real evidence of this utterance and Saint-Simon claims that Louis XIV actually said on his deathbed "I am leaving but the State shall remain," it is, however, conceivable that such a statement could have been made in the light of the other available historical material about the monarch and in keeping with the traditional notion of the sovereignty of the king.

[48] It was perhaps this idea of history that Niccolo Machiavelli, who we shall encounter in the fourth chapter, had in mind when he studied the *Discourses* of Livy

[49] This will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

what Foucault refers to as, the technologies of power or the technologies of governing obscure and inaccessible to anyone other than the monarch. And they were definitely obfuscated for the nobility who began feeling a sense of exclusion and deceit. This generated a fear of a loss of power amongst the nobility who, though they were closest to the king, were not within reach of the technologies of governing. The nobility thus began to employ a different discourse to assert itself, organizing itself for the first time as a recognizable class or group. This class of people referred to themselves as a *race*. The discourse of race or ethnicity sets itself up in competition with the sovereignty discourse.

…Of the Nobility and the Nation

The discourse of sovereignty of the king and the state was, in some ways, a foolproof discourse. The king was the representative of the people and of the will of God. Everything about him was sovereign. History (as we now understand it) was subsumed to the chronicles of the state. For the aristocracy to assert any power or be recognized as having a share in governing, it would have to employ a new knowledge. This new knowledge was the knowledge of history. And so we have a new discourse, a 'historico-political' discourse, replacing the 'juridical' discourse on which the theory of sovereignty was built. For the first time, Foucault notes, an assertion was made which based itself on the 'truth' that the past had to offer rather than an ideal system. A critique of the state or the monarch may have been made several times, a principled opposition to the state may have been mobilized before, but this time it did not refer back to norms, principles, or juridical codes that had been violated by the monarch rather it put the monarch to the test of history. The test of history was to unearth the *truth* about the past; to unearth the injustices that had *truly* occurred in the

past and to judge the monarch on *real* victories and defeats, not merely ones that were

allegorical. Foucault compares this new historico-political discourse with the juridical

discourse that we have been discussing above:

> It is not interested in passing judgments on unjust government…by
> referring them to a certain ideal schema. On the contrary, it is
> interested in defining and discovering, beneath the forms of justice that
> have been instituted, the forgotten past of real struggles, actual
> victories, and defeats…which remain profoundly inscribed…it is not
> interested in referring the relativity of history to the absolute of law,
> but in discovering beneath the stability of law or the truth, the
> indefiniteness of history.[50]

This history was not a hagiography of the king; this history was the history of the race

of the nobility, of the class of the aristocracy. Here we can mark the beginnings of the

radical claims of history as a modern discipline; of offering the truth about the past, a

search for the origins of exploitation of a people, an investigation into the true story of

their struggles.[51] This is also the moment when history would stop being the history

of the king and be legitimized as a discipline that records the history of a people

(which includes the king). Now even when history was the history of the king, it was

not as a function of his sovereignty but as a true story of the past in which the king is

but a subject like any other. Foucault has explained how the nobility makes use of

history to claim their original access to the land. They represented themselves as the

original sons of the soil who legitimately had more rights to the land than the race of

the monarchs. The nobility, having established itself as an identifiable group, a

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[50] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, 56.

[51] Foucault's subtle remark in the discussion of the lecture 'The Culture of Self' should be noted here. He claims that history became very important in France between the "end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the aristocracy and the monarchy came in competition about the foundation of their own rights..." He further adds that in this period, at around the time when the decline of the great administrative monarchy of Louis XIV began, "there was a real explosion of historical and juridical researches." Michel Foucault, "The Culture of Self: Regents lecture of April 1983," Berkeley College, http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/audiofiles.html#foucault.

separate race claims for itself a separate nation in opposition to the monarchy. The formation of this race by the mobilizing of the discipline of history, according to Foucault, can be seen as the first articulation of the formation of a nation. The discourse of the nation as a community, an ethnie, a race, that voices a certain claim or entitlement to the land on which it resides, is inaugurated by the second estate, the nobility. The understanding of the state undergoes corresponding changes. In accordance with the historico-political discourse, the state begins to be seen as a product of a contract that the people entered into. The best-selling story of the state in the seventeenth century is thus: once upon a time people lived in a primordial state of nature. They decided together to enter into a 'social contract' where absolute power was delegated to the sovereign. This sovereign was an embodiment (almost literally) of the will of the people as well as the will of God. The existence of the state is explained by the story of its origin. The historico-political discourse of the nation and the state, however, does not completely replace the juridical discourse and the latter returns in the form of the ideology of 'right.'

…Of the Bourgeoisie and the Citizen

    1. What is the Third-Estate ?---- Everything
    2. What has it been upto the present in the political order?----
Nothing
    3. What does it ask for ? ---- To be something.[52]

            Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?*

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[52] Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* (1789), 1. Sieyès writes in his famous tract :
1. Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État ? ----- Tout.
2. Qu'a-t-il été jusqu'à présent dans l'ordre politique ? ----- Rien.
3. Que demande-t-il ? ----- A être quelque chose.

The French revolution marks the organization of yet another group, the bourgeoisie, to contest for power. While the nobility had mobilized history to assert its claim to being the true contender of power, the bourgeoisie used the language of universality. The historical discourse is not abandoned but appropriated along with the juridical discourse. The bourgeoisie is able to claim, as Emmanuel Sieyès does, that they have never *in history* played an active role in politics and thus ask to be included in the processes of governing. Their absence is not merely an absence in the present but one that is based on a history of marginalization or exclusion, to speak in a more modern language.[53] Claiming that the will of God was embodied in each sovereign individual, the bourgeoisie was responsible for transferring sovereignty from the monarch to the citizen. The juridical discourse of sovereignty that previously legitimized the power of the king was now employed to give rights to each individual. The citizen was thus to perform the same functions as the monarch, because he (not yet she) was carrying out the decree of the greater will by exercising his individual will. The collective will, the greater will, or the will of God that the monarch was exercising was now dispensed as individual wills to each person. The bourgeoisie, furthermore, made itself the representative of the universal. This became necessary since several individual wills had to be taken into account and there was no embodiment of the collective will now. Representative politics was the answer to the need to govern with a language of universality. The bourgeoisie's claims to be the voice of every man and every group rested on the idea of the will of each individual being equal to another, and of all individuals being equal beings in the eyes of the *real* sovereign, God. It is the

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[53] Foucault notes in passing that this historical discourse has survived to the present but does not elaborate the point. He is perhaps referring to the 'marginalization' discourses that claim that the victims of history have always been exploited, subjugated, marginalized, and that the time for revolt is now.

institution that came about as a result of this organization that becomes famous in history as the nation. It is this nation that we refer to when we speak of the nation-state in the modern political context.

Since this nation of the bourgeoisie is not voiced as the demand for a nation from a particular group, but as a demand for the universal community of the people, it makes it possible to conflate the man and the citizen. The universal discourse later facilitates a forgetting of the fact that the creation of this entity was by a distinct group in response to a particular politics of a specific moment. Several decades later Karl Marx will critique this bourgeois nation but by then the force of its discourse will have taken root. Since it is claiming to be 'everything,' or the universal, its critique can either be a usurpation of the space of the universal or incomprehension of its premises. Once this nation of the bourgeoisie, incubated in the language of the universal, comes into being, it can only expand the tent of the universal to accommodate various groups which have hitherto been ignored but which must now become part of this universal. The historical discourse that came about to counter the juridical sovereign is made available to everyone. The new and improved juridical discourse gives everyone within the nation rights. After the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* we can have a Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen and there could follow in logical sequence a Declaration of the Rights of the Asian and Citizen and a Declaration of the Rights of _____ and Citizen—the empty space to be filled by anyone.[54] Each group under this universal tent that is the nation, however, shares a common history of sovereignty, subject-hood and citizenship. The ones who seek to be part of the universal and do not share in the history and memory

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[54] Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 1996).

of sovereignty merely ask to be included in the universal because it seems to be the only legitimate and acceptable way of speaking of recognition of an alternative politics. The universality of nationhood and citizenship also requires effacing of identity or maintaining the anonymity of the place of both nationhood and citizenship.[55] Thus all territories and people could be nations, and all individuals could be citizens. Moreover the empty position of the citizen[56] only assists the universal claim of nationhood. While the history of sovereignty is essential to understanding the force and content of these categories, the creation of these categories is itself indispensable for the progression of the history of sovereignty that is a metonymy for the history of Western political thought.

Ecumenical Claims, Parochial Conceptions

Foucault speaks of the critical shift in the legitimation of power from the juridical discourse of the state by the state to the historical discourse of the nobility about the past. But what happened to the nation of the nobility? The discursive category of the nation of the aristocracy could not become a category of administration or legislation, which is the only form of politics available to the Western world. It is the third estate (tiers-état) that takes on the historico-political discourse and democratizes the understanding of sovereignty, speaking of it in the language of the universal. The nation comes into being as an object, which becomes the subject of history in history. So while the bourgeoisie can speak of itself as an ethnie, a race, a people, a nation; it also speaks of itself in history as an empty location in empty homogeneous time. The trajectory of this marriage of the historical and juridical discourses naturally

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[55] This will be further discussed in the next chapter.

[56] Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*.

culminates in the governmentality of nations. The perilous category of the nation of the nobility gains an afterlife in the theories of nationalism, after the state is established. This enables the survival of the unstable, though discursively rich, category of the nation-state which on the one hand claims universality of sovereignty (collective will of all individual wills) and on the other hand a unified ethnic origin.

Recapitulating the theories of the nation and of the state, we may now be able to identify them along the trajectory of sovereignty as examples of the historico-political discourse. The theories of nationalism even in their contemporary avatar continue to explain the nation in the language of history. The nation as an imagined community necessarily erases the memory of the moment and the context of its origin.

Along the trajectory of the Western discourse, it does seem like the only way to organize a political community is around sovereignty. The monarch, the state, the citizens are all sovereigns. The understanding of sovereignty however relies on the understanding of the will. The will is not an immediately perspicuous term and is in fact intelligible only in a particular theological context. Albrecht Dihle examines the key role that the concept of will plays in the "doctrines of intellect and sensual life, freedom and determination, moral evaluation of purpose and action, and, above all, in that of fall and redemption"[57] in St. Augustine's tracts. The idea of will

> corresponded to the indistinct but persistent voluntarism that permeates the Biblical tradition. From St. Augustine's reflections emerged the concept of a human will, prior to and independent of the act of intellectual cognition, yet fundamentally different from sensual and

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[57] Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, vol. 48, *Sather Classical Lectures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 127.

irrational emotion, by which man can give his reply to the inexplicable
utterances of the divine will.[58]

While Dihle lays out a theory of will in classical and late antiquity, he points out that

the modern notion of will owes its inception to Augustine's theory of will. Given that

the notion of the will is a central concept in the understanding of the stories of both,

the nation and the state, how do we read their claims to universality? Can a deeply

Biblical concept such as that of the will have universal translatability? The

intelligibility of this category in a non-Biblical, non-theological context and its

relationship to subjecthood and identity will be taken up for discussion in the next

chapter where we shall interrogate the idea of the sovereign citizen. At this juncture

we need to be wary of the catholic assertions of the discourse of the nation-state.

Seeing the World Through Nation-State Tinted Glasses

The nation sees itself everywhere. Once we recognize the historical context that

enabled, or rather necessitated the discourse of the nation, we can perhaps begin to

appreciate the idea that a different historical condition need not bring about a nation.

A different historical condition would give rise, not to a different kind of nation-state

but rather to another way of organizing a political community. The fourth chapter

undertakes a study of the organization of political communities in the ancient Greek

period. Alternative ways of conceptualizing political communities enable us to

explore the idea that the nation-state may not be an adequate category of political

analysis in the Indian context. Furthermore it will become more apparent why an

examination of different kinds of political organization cannot be undertaken without

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[58] Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, 127.

dismantling the category of the nation-state. The discourse of the nation-state, once

put in place, begins to address all political communities as nation-states. Thus we

have the Indian nation-state, the Chinese nation-state and even the ancient Greek

nation-state. To be able to begin an empirical study of political communities, it is

essential to demonstrate that the nation-state—the label we attach to any sizable

political community—is not a universally intelligible category.

To reinforce the inadequacy of the category of the nation-state in political

analysis in India let us briefly look at the moment of inception of the national

discourse in India—the Indian National movement.

….and then there was the Indian Nation

> [For the early Indian nationalists] the main enemy was not British Rule
> as such, but the backwardness of the people, the lack of modern
> development of the country, the strength of the forces of obscurantism
> and ignorance.[59]
>
> R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Indian subcontinent was going

through a struggle for independence from the British rule. This movement has

commonly been called the 'nationalist struggle' or the 'national movement.' The

culmination of the struggle was the Indian nation. The national movement has had its

landmarks and significant moments; the 'first war of independence,' the setting up of

the Indian national congress, the *Swadeshi* movement, the cry of *Inqualāb zindābād*,

the Non-Cooperation movement, the *Dāndī* march, the Quit India movement and so

on. Further, this struggle has been described as "one of the biggest mass movements

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[59] R. Palme Dutt, *India Today* (London: 1940), 288.

that modern society has ever seen."[60] Thus the story that we have is that the people of

India formed a collective against the British government and struggled towards

forming an independent nation-state.

This narrative has been notoriously reiterated with several modifications and

sometimes appropriate apologies. The apology is for the discontinuities, the gaps and

the absences of the people and of their real struggles. In his introduction to *India's

Struggle for Independance: 1857-1947*, Bipin Chandra reviews the various schools

that do not prescribe to the narrative of the Indian national movement and thus "deny

the existence of the Indian nation."[61] The Cambridge historians claim that what is

commonly called the Indian nation is nothing but a fragmented group of religious,

communal and caste identities.[62] A more sophisticated critique of the nation can be

located in the writings of what began as the 'Subaltern Studies Collective.' While

Chandra dismisses the subaltern critique as bearing a "disturbing resemblance to the

imperialist and neo-imperialist characterization of the national movement,"[63] the point

that the subalterns are making is indeed a significant one. Beginning with the "failure

of the 'nation' to come into its own as a fundamental problem of modern Indian

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[60] Bipin Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947* (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1988), 13.

[61] Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*, 17-22.

[62] This argument can be attributed to historians like Anil Seal, J. Gallaghar and C. J Baker. For a more detailed study of this position see: J. Gallaghar, G. Johnson, and A. Seal, eds., *Locality, Province and Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late 19th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968),C.J. Baker, G. Johnson, and Anil Seal, eds., *Power, Profit and Politics: Essays on Imperialism, Nationalism and Change in 20th Century India*, *Modern Asian Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[63] Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*, 20.

history,"[64] the collective makes two kinds of comments on the Indian nation: (i) the national movement co-opted the struggles of the subalterns; the task of the collective thus being one of recreating those voices or unearthing the silences; (ii) the history that is so far available is only a statist history—history is the biography of the state.[65] The hegemony of the state "thematizes and evaluates the past."[66] The elites orchestrate various movements into a story of nationalism. The Subaltern Collective asserts that the nation is brought into being by the elite and that there is a need to recover the subaltern voice and consciousness. There is, however, something very puzzling about the conclusions of the Collective's studies. While asserting that the movement (if one can speak of fragmentary episodes of struggle between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries as a movement) was not a national movement, the historians of the Collective nevertheless speak of the history that they are writing as one which is against the nation-state, as one that is subaltern. On the one hand the Collective opens out to us a space for characterizing afresh the episodes of what is called the national movement, and on the other hand it denies that space by accepting that the nation exists as an object.[67] There is, further, a desire to represent the nation, to tell its story, when its ontological status is as yet uncertain. Homi Bhabha asks:

> How do we plot the narrative of the nation that must mediate between
> the teleology of progress tipping over into the 'timeless' discourse of
> irrationality? How do we understand that 'homogeneity' of

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[64] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Invitation to a Dialogue," in *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 373.

[65] Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India," *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992).

[66] Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Publications, 1982), 1.

[67] See the discussion of the third group in chapter one for an elaboration of the contradictions in this understanding of the nation-state.

> modernity—the people—which, if pushed too far, may assume something resembling the archaic body of the despotic or totalitarian mass?[68]

And he answers:

> The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative.[69]

Bhabha's nation, unstable, constantly recreating and re-signifying itself must be one that has been primarily constructed on a 'pre-given authority'—it is one that *has* been put into place, no matter how ephemerally. Whether we want to tell the continuist story of the elite nation-state or we choose to perform the scraps of daily life, the stage of the nation can only be built on the foundation of sovereignty. But again, what about the complex living network of relationships that can write itself in another discourse?

Society, *Desh*, *Genos*

> [W]hat is this Nation?
>
> A nation, in the sense of the political and the economic union of the people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose. *Society as such has no ulterior purpose.* It is an end in itself. It is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. It is a natural regulation of human relationships,

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[68] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 54.

[69] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 60.

> so that men can develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another (emphasis added).[70]

<div align="right">Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism</div>

> [P]arent seems by nature, to feel for its offspring and offspring for parent, not only among men but among birds and among most animals; it is felt mutually by members of the same genos…[71]

<div align="right">Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics</div>

One of the most incisive critiques of the nation can be found in Rabindranath Tagore's *Nationalism*. Tagore's critique of the nation is pitched at two levels. At one level Tagore invokes the Indian experience to say that "India has never had a real sense of nationalism."[72] The idea of the nation has been introduced to India by the British and the *educated* Indians are attempting to learn lessons of nationalism from the history of the West, in turn giving up the wisdom offered by "our ancestors."[73] Tagore argues that one cannot make another people's experience of their past one's own.

> [W]e cannot borrow other people's history and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life.[74]

The nation is a product of the Western past and it has come about as a result of the way in which the West has dealt with the problems in its own past. And so for India to

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[70] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1992), 51.

[71] Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 232. While the translator has translated 'genos' as 'race,' I have retained this word in the original since it is this contentious concept that this section of the chapter tries to understand. Several other scholars have translated the term '*genos*' as family, clan, race, community, sect, school and so on.

[72] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 83.

[73] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 83.

[74] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 84.

speak of itself as a nation would be to accept the solutions of another civilization's

problems. The second level critique is that of the nation itself and not of the stilted

character of the nation in the East. It is not even a condemnation of the British nation,

which Tagore believes to be the best amongst nations.

> It is not a question of the British government, but of government by the
> Nation—the Nation which is organized self-interest of a whole people,
> where it is least human and least spiritual.[75]

The nation, Tagore argues, is the upshot of a historical process, aided by the progress

in science, that has alienated man from his moral ethos making room for a political,

commercial being who is governed by "the abstract being, the Nation."[76] The nation,

he writes is an "applied science…[that is] impersonal, and on that account completely

effective."[77] He further identifies the root of the impersonal forces of nationalism.

> The truth is that the spirit of conflict and conquest is at the origin and
> in the centre of western nationalism; its basis is not social co-operation.
> It has evolved a perfect organization of power but not of spiritual
> idealism. It is like a pack of predatory creatures that must have its
> victims.[78]

What Tagore identifies as the 'spirit of conquest' of the Western civilization is

perhaps the logical culmination of the discourse of sovereignty. Foucault recognizes

that, with modern governments, a 'disciplinary power'[79] that maintains continuous

surveillance comes into being. Tagore similarly identifies the nation as a powerful

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[75] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 55.

[76] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 54.

[77] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 56.

[78] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 59.

[79] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, 36.

mechanism for enforcing law and order.[80] "But," he asks, "is not this order merely a negative good?"[81] Presumably Tagore sees a more positive good emerging out of, what he refers to as, a *society*. He, however, does not elaborate what this positive good could be, and we may turn to another treatise, seemingly removed from Tagore, to deliberate upon the 'good' within a community/society.

> Every *polis* is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good[82]

Aristotle begins his *Politics* by emphasizing the need for a *polis,*[83] which he explains is a community of some kind. All communities are established with some good[84] in mind and the *polis* being the highest in order of all communities, naturally aims at the highest good. What does this *eudaimonia*, this good life mean? What kind of community is this that plays a role in the realization of the good of the highest order? It is not only impossible to give quick and easy answers to questions of this kind, it may not even be possible to provide an adequate description of the community in the ancient Greek period after a detailed and meticulous study.[85] We can at best provide

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[80] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 60.

[81] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 60.

[82] Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.

[83] I will retain the term *polis* in the original transliterated form throughout the thesis. It has variously been translated as 'city-state,' 'city,' 'state' and so on.

[84] Here I have translated '*eudaimonia*' as good and good life. *Eudaimonia* may also be translated as happiness. J.M. Cooper translates it as 'human flourishing.' John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986). While he presents convincing reasons for rejecting the term 'happiness' as a good translation, the phrase 'human flourishing' implies a teleological human existence in which human flourishing occurs in one stage. While Aristotle may have had a notion of the stages of man's life, I do not think *eudaimonia* is restricted to any one of them.

[85] In the quest to discover what the difficulty is with the theorization of Indian institutions, we have stumbled upon a similar problem with the representation of institutions in ancient Greece. While the thesis largely concentrates on the difficulty with the political language in which Indian (or ancient Greek) institutions are represented, we are also alert to a possible difficulty with the act of

some paradigmatic examples or instances of the things that the community does and hope that the idea of the community is communicated.

One of the ways in which the good (life) may be thought of is in terms of the care of the self.[86] Though the care of the self involves solitary phases, it can only be conducted within a network of relationships that is conducive to the care of the self. One of the things that the care for the self involves is reflecting on the wisdom of one's ancestors and of one's community. This community could be, as Foucault elaborates, a family, a clan, a school of thought or a polis. In each case, it is a thick network of relationships within which one operates and whose values one imbibes, deliberates upon, and critiques as well as transmits. In this mesh of relations we may be able to locate an alternative way of conceptualizing a political community: the *desh*, or the *genos*. This project, however, cannot take off until we have deconstructed the categories with which we currently represent our political communities. This thesis is merely an attempt at such a deconstruction. While we shall briefly return to the discussion of alternative political communities (and an understanding of membership to them) in the fourth chapter, it is only to set the stage for a future reconceptualization of our political experience and not to present a ready alternative interpretation of Indian politics.

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representation itself. While we will return to this briefly in the fifth chapter, for now we will try to steer clear of attempting to represent or characterize and will rather explain through examples and stories.

[86] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-1982*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)., Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 3 vols., vol. 3, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1990). A discussion of the individual in a polis and *eudaiemonia* is taken up in the third chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 3

Subject to Democracy: The Identity of the Citizen

> We are citizens of a great country on the verge of bold advance, and
> we have to live up to that high standard. All of us, to whatever religion
> we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights,
> privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism or
> narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are
> narrow in thought or in action.[1]

> Jawaharlal Nehru

> You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to
> do with the business of the State…We are starting with this
> fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one
> State.[2]

> Mohammed Ali Jinnah

The experience of democracy is constituted by the sovereign and choosing subject.

This subject is the citizen of a nation-state. Classical theories recognize the subject of

the nation-state as one who is free and equal; freedom for them being the freedom of

choice or the freedom to exercise one's individual will. This notion of liberty is a

'negative' one: freedom from arbitrary interference or coercion. Modern theorists too

rely on the idea of the sovereign subject but liberty for them means the *ability* to act

as one's will dictates. This 'positive' notion of freedom lays more emphasis on

equality and the conditions conducive to being able to act freely.[3] The relationship

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[1] The famous "Tryst with Destiny" speech by the first Prime Minister of independent India, delivered on the eve of Indian independence. Brian McArthur, *Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches* (London: Penguin Viking, 1992), 234-237.

[2] This is an excerpt from an address made by Mohammad Ali Jinnah to the first ever meeting of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, quoted in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27. Bose and Jalal claim that the sentiment expressed in this speech was, unfortunately, easily forgotten and Jinnah continues to be associated with the creation of an Islamist state.

[3] The classic discussion of this notion of freedom is Isaiah Berlin's essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty.' Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

between the nation-state and the citizen is a more paternalistic one; one focused on welfare and policy. Both classical and modern discourses thus, despite their differences, rely on the discourse of sovereignty, or what Foucault identifies as the historico-political discourse of sovereignty.

In the previous chapter we elaborated this story of the nation and also presented Foucault's critique of the nation-state as a historico-political discourse. In this chapter, we begin by provisionally abandoning Foucault's critique and taking on the story of the nation on its own terms. The purpose of doing so is two-fold. First, to take into account a broad criticism of Foucault's study: that no matter what the genealogy of the discourse, a secularized narrative in the present day, consciously indifferent to its origins, can be intelligible sans the context of its origin. That is to say, the story of the nation, rendered secular by a particular group in a particular historical moment, has now become what it claimed to be, namely, universal. Through repeated assertions of universality the nation-state has now *become a universal category.* Second, to critique afresh the nation-citizen discourse. For this it is essential to begin with story of the citizen.

The term citizen is misleading. It seems to refer to membership of a city, as indeed it once did. Today, however, it implies membership to a nation-state. Members of a nation are organized into a community by a common inheritance and a singular memory of the past, a heritage and memory that may be imagined or constructed; its actual existence or historical authenticity is not a matter of much significance. Such a community can trace its genealogy to certain common goals and values; and members of the community of that nation will work towards perpetuating those goals and values. However, the role of the citizen of the *nation-state* is a slightly different one.

It is, as expressed in the speeches of Nehru and Jinnah, the elimination of all kinds of discrimination and particularly the becoming of equal citizens despite the narrow identity confines of religion, caste or creed. The position of the citizen within a *democratic* nation-state is still more complex. Having subsumed (primitive) identities into the status of citizenship, the democratic citizen is also a representative of plurality, heterogeneity and diversity. Almost inevitably, in any contemporary discussion of democracy the debate meanders towards representation and identity politics. To be part of a healthy democracy is to see the proliferation of heterogeneous groups of people, all living in (at least a semblance of) harmony within the same nation-state. While a democratic nation-state would necessarily treat all its citizens equally, it would also allow and (increasingly) encourage particular identities to speak for their own rights and specific interests. Moreover the very cornerstone of a modern democracy is the smooth functioning of the representative electoral process. The representative process is not only one of representing the interests of groups within a democracy but it is also characterized by a politics of presence. It may seem inevitable then to speak of 'identity' within a democracy. The paradox, however, is this: while all citizens are equal, why is an assertion of identity considered so important (and inevitable) for a democratic society? If all individuals in a nation-state are equal, at least in the eyes of the state, then why does this equality require the predication of identity?

It would be natural to turn to the theories of citizenship and democracy to understand why this paradox arises and how the different theories attempt to come to terms with it. We can, however, address the paradox only once we have clarified the relationship between identity and membership to a community. The relationship of

identity and membership to a community has been a continual concern within

Western political theorization and the paradox that is thrown up in the modern period

should be read with the tradition of deliberations on identity and subjecthood. The

task at hand is to identify the relationship between identity and membership to a

community in different political epochs. This will allow us to inquire into the concept

of the individual and her role in a political community in different political processes.

Three Epochs of Western Political Process

In an attempt to articulate the dynamic relationship between political process and

identity, Etienne Balibar proposes a study of 'citizenship' and its shifting dependence

on the identity of the individual throughout the course of Western political history. He

presents a powerful, though abstract, scheme to examine the role of identity. He does

so by dividing Western political history into three periods or 'epochs':

> an *ancient* epoch in which the concept of the citizen is subordinated to
> anthropological differences, to unequal status of the free man and the
> slave, the sovereign and the subject, 'adult' and 'tutelary' humanity; a
> *modern* epoch in which the concepts of man and citizen are virtually
> identified, opening the right to politics to all humans; finally a *post-
> modern* epoch in which the question of going beyond the abstract or
> generic concept of man on the basis of generalized citizenship is
> posed.[4]

These 'epochs' are distinguished by the changes that Balibar notes in the

representation and function of an individual in a political community at different

points in European history. Though the three epochs are called the ancient, modern

and post-modern, they do not "succeed upon one another, or engender one another,

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[4] Etienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes and Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

they do not supplant one another like the scenes of a play."[5] They present an exposition of the relationship between identity and membership to a political community within each particular political system.

The ancient or pre-modern citizen is one whose status is based on the *natural identity*, of being male, propertied, adult and suchlike 'anthropological' factors. The citizen of a democracy is one who is so because he is equal to all other citizens. This equality is, of course not an empirical feature of human beings, since it would be evident to anybody that all human beings are not equal in any quantifiable sense of the term. But in positing a citizen without any distinctive markers, he becomes an equal, in the state, to all other citizens. Balibar further states that there is, after this 'modern epoch' of the unmarked citizen, a 'post-modern epoch' where identities become crucial and differences are recognized by the nation-state itself. Balibar seems to suggest that identity returns to playing a critical role in the post-modern epoch from the pre-modern epoch where it figured centrally in determining one's status as a citizen.

We will initially conduct our study within the framework that Balibar has set up, since this frame provides an interesting characterization of the political scenario and offers an expedient handle on Western political theory, allowing for a study of material that is vast and often subject to crude generalizations. It is not possible to take up a study, within the social sciences, that covers over two thousand years unless a comparative or linear frame is drawn up to examine and sift through the plethora of events and processes that will be part of the period. Balibar's framework provides a

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[5] Balibar, *Masses, Classes and Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*, 59.

sort of scaffolding upon which we can build a study of identity and citizenship. And just as a scaffolding is pulled down once it has provided an initial frame, we too will abandon Balibar's frame and begin the process of constructing our own arguments. As our argument proceeds we will ask whether Balibar's frame can indeed be a legitimate framework for the study of identity and citizenship. For though Balibar presents a crisp thesis of the shifts in the relationship between identity and citizenship, the question that perhaps needs to be asked is this: Has the understanding of identity remained stable from the pre-modern to the post-modern period? Is the post-modern identity the same as the identity in pre-modern politics? Here we need to look more carefully at what identity refers to in modern and post-modern politics and then examine the nature of identity in the ancient epoch. While Balibar himself presents no detailed understanding of the concepts of identity and citizenship in relation to the political systems or a historical analysis of these epochs, this chapter will try to examine seriously the crucial observation that he makes about the significance of identity in the discourse of citizenship in different political processes. The task of this chapter will be to interrogate the validity of referring to all types of membership to a community as citizenship. Further, the category of identity and what constitutes identity will also be briefly examined. Thus while Balibar's framework will be employed to assist our study of the relationship between citizenship, identity and political process, the framework will itself eventually become the object of our critical examination.

The Ancient Epoch

In his investigation of the 'private'[6] man and citizen in the ancient period, Balibar asks the question: What is the role of identity in determining citizenship? To this question the answer would naturally be that only an individual who is an adult male possessing a certain amount of property can have the privilege of citizenship. While all these are strictly not 'natural' attributes, we would understand the sentiment with which Balibar then dismisses the matter of citizenship in the ancient epoch by stating that the membership to the *polis* is subordinated to natural anthropological factors. Given the way the question is framed and its predictable answer, it is possible to conclude that citizenship in the ancient period was based on the inequalities that exist between human beings. These inequalities are not only highlighted but assume a central place in determining a person's role in the polity.

Let us however begin by asking a prior question: What does it mean to be the citizen of the *polis*? Or to be a citizen in the ancient epoch? That is to say, what does the term citizenship or membership to a *polis* imply for an individual in the ancient epoch? This is a prior question because if citizenship or membership to a political community/institution implied for the ancients something very different from what it means to be a citizen of a modern state, then it would be a mistake to continue to speak of the relationship between identity and citizenship within this comparative framework. That is to say, citizenship in the modern period has a specific relation to identity as we now understand it. It is only possible to compare the relationship of

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[6] Post-French Revolution citizenship conflates the public man and the private citizen in one grand move with the 'Declaration of the Rights of the Man and Citizen.' Much has been written about this collapsing of the private and the public. Be that as it may, it is important to note that the distinction of public and private as we understand it today is only a post-French Revolution categorization.

identity with citizenship in the ancient period with the same relationship in the

modern and post-modern period if the understanding of the term citizenship and

identity is similar in all epochs. However if citizenship in the ancient period were to

imply a completely different beast, it is obvious that its relationship to identity (even

if that were taken as a constant) would be different.

Citizen and Member of the Polis

> There is often much dispute about the citizen, for not everyone agrees that the same person is a citizen…he, who is a citizen of one regime, may not be the citizen of another…*A citizen is one who shares in governing and being governed.* He differs under different forms of government, but in the best state he is one who is able and chooses to be governed and govern with a view to the life of excellence (emphasis added). [7]
>
> Aristotle, *The Politics*

Two observations may be made about the above quotation from Aristotle. On the one

hand we notice that the Aristotle's views on citizenship seem too familiar and

comforting, so much so that some sentences almost seem pleonastic. His elaboration

of citizenship appears to be merely a definition of the citizen—that he should be one

who shares in governing and being governed. This understanding of citizenship, we

may even argue, is no different from the modern idea of a citizen who governs and is

governed largely by representation. However, we know that women and slaves (as

well as children and aliens and men who had lost wealth) were not given the status of

citizens. So what does Aristotle mean when he says that a citizen is one who shares in

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[7] Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 71. J. G. A. Pocock understands the utterance, "who share in governing and being governed," as referring only to those members of society who play an active role in governing. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1975).

governing and being governed? Women and slaves should also be considered citizens

then for even though they are not governing; they are sharing in being governed.

Slaves, women, children are however not considered citizen, though a slave may

become a citizen by an act of manumission[8] and children who are born to citizens will

become citizens when they are adults. So, citizenship is only for those who are

capable of governing and since all people capable of governing cannot govern at the

same time, there would be those who would have to share in being governed until the

point when they are governing themselves. A citizenry is a body of people who are

capable of governing the *polis*, not in terms of potential, but as qualified members

with the education that makes them good legislators.[9] That the Greeks were convinced

that all citizens made equally good governors of the *polis* can be inferred from the fact

that they chose their magistrates by lots and not by election as we do. If all citizens

are actually equal in their ability to conduct the administration and governing of a

polis, then it follows that their selection be random and left to luck, just as their

identities were largely the product of a stroke of necessary luck (or bad luck).

Moreover, membership to the *polis* did not necessarily entail citizenship. All

people living within the *polis* were members of that *polis* and, as M.H Hansen's study

indicates, women also took the name of the *polis* in their full name.[10] This does not

imply that they were citizens. They were, nonetheless, considered members of the

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[8] Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 108.

[9] The qualifications may differ with different 'regimes' and different political systems.

[10] Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Use of Sub-Ethnics as a Part of the Name of a Greek Citizen of the Classical Period: The Full Name of a Greek Citizen," in *Even More Studies in the Ancient Greek Polis: Papers from the Copenhagen Polis Centre 6*, ed. Thomas Heine Nielsen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002).

polis as opposed to non-members like aliens, slaves and children. W. R. Connor

explains:

> Being Athenian was not the automatic result of being born into a
> society in which all the members shared the same genetic and cultural
> inheritances. Civic identity could not be taken for granted; it had to be
> constructed and reconstructed in each generation by shared myths, by
> participation in cults, festivals and ceremonies.[11]

Connor is correct in asserting that citizenship is not just a matter of inheritance but

one of fulfilling of other conditions and, more significantly, maintaining them. While

he gives the example of participation in festivals and ceremonies, a more

straightforward example would be the maintaining of one's property. A bankrupt man

could not be given the privilege of being a citizen. A distinction needs to be made

between citizenship and membership to the *polis*. Being Athenian may indeed be a

matter of inheritance, but being a citizen of Athens was another thing altogether.

Connor's reference is to the latter. Women born to free residents of the *polis* were

counted as free members and indeed not considered barbarians or slaves unless, per

chance, their father were enslaved or the *polis* taken over by another people. Then

both the father and the daughter would not retain status as free members of the *polis*.

After providing us this interesting insight into the nature of membership to the

polis, Connor's analysis simply reiterates that which has become part of our educated

commonsense view of ancient Greek politics: that the Greek political community was

extremely exclusive and discriminating and did not admit the active participation of

several kinds of people. This familiar statement on Greek politics arises from the

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[11] W. R. Connor, *The Origins of Citizenship in Ancient Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 41.

modern understanding of citizenship—to be a citizen is to have certain rights within

the territory of one's nation-state. We may note a similar conclusion in yet another

interesting study on Athenian politics by Josiah Ober. Ober asks:

> How did the Athenians manage to go on together as an internally
> diverse and *democratically governed community*, one that sought (if
> never altogether successfully) to promote conditions of *justice*, in the
> face of so many circumstances that made going on so very
> difficult(emphasis added)?[12]

An answer is sought in the existence of what Ober calls "quasi rights" or "legally

enforced immunities from coercion…which are the pre-conditions to personal

autonomy and liberty in respect to choice-making that are enshrined as the 'rights of

the moderns.'"[13] There are several difficulties in understanding Ober's thesis on the

survival of the Athenian community, which he conflates with the survival of Athenian

democracy. A preliminary discomfort lies with the evidence that Ober provides for

the survival of Athenian democracy. He rhetorically asks why "Socrates [chose] to

live in the city of Athens and obey its laws, despite his belief that other places were

better governed." Ober believes it is because Athenians were committed to the

survival of the Athenian community over and above their own sectarian interests and,

in the case of Socrates, even his personal convictions. Socrates's obedience to

Athenian law, on the one hand, and his extremely vocal critique of it, on the other

hand, is often characterized, if not as plain hypocrisy, at least as a discordance in his

philosophical arguments. More sharply, Cicero's presiding over Roman religious

activities, while himself doubting the existence of gods, has been a topic of much

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[12] Josiah Ober, *Athenian Legacies: Essays on the Politics of Going on Together* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5. This book is a sequel to Josiah Ober, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[13] Ober, *Athenian Legacies: Essays on the Politics of Going on Together*, 93.

debate amongst students of the Greco-Roman period. This apparent disjunction

between action and belief is often read as absurdity or insincerity and sometimes, as

with Ober, as a mark of deep allegiance to the community.[14]

Another problem with this understanding of Athenian democracy is the positing

of rights ('quasi-' or otherwise) as an answer to the question of justice. Rights as we

understand them today can only be traced back to the twelfth-thirteenth century

rediscovery (or reinterpretation) of Justinian's Digest.[15] Richard Tuck's thesis on the

origin of natural rights can amply demonstrate that this reinterpretation was founded

on a theological misunderstanding of property (*dominion*) as a kind of right (*urs*).[16]

But citizenship to the Greek *polis* was not associated primarily with entitlements of

any kind, though it did, of course, offer privileges. Richard Sorabji argues in *Animal*

Minds and Human Morals that we see something like 'human rights' in the Stoic idea

of justice "because of the misleading habit of English translators of rendering the

Stoic definition of justice as a disposition to distribute things according to their due.

The English notion of due does suggest entitlement and so perhaps right. But the Stoic

phrase is once again according to *axia*, or in Latin *digum*. This time I think the

meaning is according to what is appropriate."[17] John M. Cooper contends that we

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[14] S. N. Balagangadhara poses the question most clearly. "How could Cicero decry augury and be a member of the board of augurs?" Citing several such examples, Balagangadhara argues that the sphere of religious and philosophical debates and deliberations (*religio*) was distinct from the sphere of traditional practice (*traditio*). The sphere of the *traditio* consists of the practices that are "retained because they have been transmitted over generations, and they require no other legitimation…philosophical argumentation may establish or prove some opinion, but it is irrelevant to traditional practice." S.N. Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness…: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 41-42.

[15] The Justinian Digest refers to Byzantine Emperor Justinian's great legal codification of the sixth century.

[16] Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[17] Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 138.

should be allowed to use the word 'rights' to characterize the work of ancient writers

such as Aristotle because it is a "useful single term"[18] with which we can not only

draw together the views of a variety of thinkers but also unify dispersed elements in

the thoughts of thinkers like Aristotle about "what is 'just,' what a certain person or

group of persons has 'open to it' or 'is eligible for,' what a given official or the people

as a whole has the 'authority' to do, and what someone is by justice and law

'immune' from."[19] It allows us to make clear a central element in his theories—"the

ways in which individual citizens and officials are assigned their functions or their

areas of freedom, and protected in their actions within them."[20] However he himself

admits that when used to translate Aristotle's work, the word would have quite a

different meaning from the modern sense of it—it would not imply the acceptance, or

even the recognition, of the idea of 'subjective freedoms' that modern notions of

'right' are based on. If we were thus to understand justice as appropriateness rather

than entitlement, it would, minimally, debunk Ober's thesis that Athens was

democratic (for even slavery can be deemed appropriate as indeed Aristotle does view

it). More significantly it alerts us to the unsettling idea that membership to the Greco-

Roman political community cannot be spoken of in terms of a citizenship if the

understanding of citizenship is deeply rooted in the language of rights (and duties).

However we do not want to say that the law (for want of a better word), based on

justice as appropriateness, was an arbitrary one. Following from that we can ask

another kind of question: what is the understanding of a person who is a recipient of

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[18] John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays in Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 383.

[19] Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays in Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory,* 383.

[20] Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays in Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory,* 383.

such a law? Or more loosely, what was the understanding of the individual within a

polity in the Greco-Roman period?

Necessary Identities, [21] Providential Individuals and Agency

> He who is without *polis because of his nature and not by some accident,* is either a bad man or superhuman. He is like the one Homer denounces as 'deprived of his group, and of his hearth.' Having such a nature he is keen on war, and—to use a term from the board-game—he stands isolated.[22]
>
> Aristotle, *The Politics*

The above lines follow one of Aristotle's most quoted lines, "Man is a political

animal," which is unfailingly understood to mean that being political is a defining

characteristic of human beings. The quality of being a political animal is predicated

upon man. It is an attribute of man that he is a political animal.[23] The lines quoted

above would then be taken to mean that if a man is without a *polis*, he is going against

his innate human nature and therefore he is either a 'bad man' or 'superhuman.' But

Aristotle's use of 'nature' or 'natural' in other contexts should give us pause. The

polis exists by nature and slavery too exists by nature. Perhaps here 'nature' should

not be understood as that which is opposed to civilization but more as the converse of

'unnatural' or 'abnormal.' 'Man is a political animal' could thus be read as: Man's

belonging to the *polis* is part of a natural order. And not as: It is a part of man's innate

nature to be political.

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[21] I owe the phrase 'necessary identities' to a chapter from Bernard Williams's book, *Shame and Necessity*.

[22] Aristotle, *The Politics*, 3-7. The 'board-game' refers to a game by the name of Polis. A detailed analysis of the game can be found in R.G. Austin, "Greek Board-Games," *Antiquity* 14 (1940). and M. H. Hansen, "The Game Called Polis," in *Even More Studies in the Ancient Greek Polis: Papers from the Copenhagen Polis Centre 6.* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002).

[23] This is understood in the same form as the sentence 'X is 6ft tall.'

It is also within the natural order that one may locate 'identities' that we have hitherto been referring to as 'natural identities.' In a chapter called 'Necessary Identities' in his book, *Shame and Necessity,* Bernard Williams has laid out a complex understanding of identities: not as natural, but as necessary. Thus Aristotle was only able to defend slavery as a necessary identity, as a part of the natural order of human society. The fixing of identities, if such a phrase is appropriate, was dependant on a certain providence. It is amply clear how providence can work in maintaining or losing wealth, or in changing one's status from a resident to an alien if one's land were to be held captive by another. Moreover a free man could also be captured as a slave and a slave manumitted to freedom (though not to citizenship).[24] Along similar lines, being born a free man, and not a woman or a slave, was also attributed to providence. A person was by chance given an identity and following from that identity he was to follow a particular way of life. It was thus in the context of this understanding of the identity of a person as dependent on sheer luck that Williams claims, that "notions of luck, of justice and of identity are very tightly enmeshed in this area."[25]

Such a rendering of an individual or of a person will not only have serious repercussions for the way in which we will understand the goals of this individual (which will be discussed briefly in the next section) but also affect the way in which questions of agency are posed. Linked unmistakably to subject-hood, possession of agency is always the primary indicator of a free subject. Besides, most often, a subject and an agent are spoken of interchangeably. Any modern discussion of agency is,

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[24] Manumission to citizenship was not a practice till the glory of the Roman Empire. See Williams, *Shame and Necessity.*

[25] Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 120.

willy-nilly related to (the freedom of or the exercise of) the will. Understanding and

characterizing the will would require a theological expertise which I do not possess,

but we can nevertheless try to examine how questions of agency with regard to the

freedom of will are posed in relation to antiquity.[26] According to Jean Pierre Vernant

and Pierre Vidal-Naquet:

> In the fifth century Athens the individual, with his own particular
> character, emerged as subject to the law… but neither the individual
> nor his internal life had acquired enough consistency and autonomy to
> make the subject the centre of the decisions from which his actions
> were believed to emanate. Cut off from his familial, civic, and
> religious roots the individual was nothing; he did not find himself
> alone, he ceased to exist. As we have seen, even in law the idea of
> intention remained vague and equivocal. *In making a decision a
> subject did not exercise a power of auto-determination truly his
> own…*in the work of Euripides human life, cut off from the general
> order of the world governed by the gods, appears so indeterminate and
> confused *that it leaves no room for responsible action* (emphasis
> added).[27]

In the works of Euripides and others that Vernant and Vidal-Naquet analyze, they

observe characters that act, take decisions of consequence and enact ethical choices.

But this does not seem to be a sufficient marker of their being 'responsible' agents.

There is a perceived lack of "auto determination truly [their] own." What is it that

Vernant and Vidal-Naquet find missing? Why, despite the evidence of an act which

has occurred, do they feel hesitant to attribute this act to the character who is (in the

dramatic series) said to have caused it. This puzzle about agency does not bother

Vernant and Vidal-Naquet alone. It has been an area of concern even within the

earliest studies of antiquity. According to Bernard Williams:

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[26] Also see Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, vol. 48, *Sather Classical Lectures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[27] Jean Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 82-84.

> First, the Homeric poems contain people who make decisions and act on them. It may seem extraordinary that this should need to be said, but there is a theory, proposed by Bruno Snell and others and still very influential, that even this fundamental capacity to understand people as being agents was beyond Homeric reach. 'Homer's man does not yet regard himself as the source of his own decisions,' Snell wrote. He was not alone in this view; Christian Voigt said that in Homer 'man still possesses no concept of… deciding for himself.'"[28]

Williams further identifies this lack of 'auto determination' that critics complain about as a mourning for the absence of will. "What people miss, I suspect, is a 'will' that has these two features: it is expressed in action rather than in endurance…and it serves in the interest of only one kind of motive, the motives of morality. In particular it serves in the interest of duty."[29] Williams goes on to explain that the abstract modern conception of duty was unavailable to the ancient Greeks. To elaborate Williams's point, the Greeks did not seem to possess an understanding of action undertaken to fulfill a duty which was unmotivated by fear or pleasure.[30] Thus the performance of an action because it *ought* to be done, was not familiar to the ancient Greeks. The expression of human action or decisions does not seem to reflect a sovereignty of will of the kind we will see being expressed by the modern citizen. Moreover the actions of the individual exhibit the influence of the supernatural—the Gods and the prophesies; of rituals, customs and traditions; and of other people. This has also led critics to state that the Greek individual could only exist in the web of social, political and religious relations, that he had little 'individuality' or that his actions were not truly his own. While the Greek individual did take actions and even responsibility for them, these actions though rich in ethical and social deliberations

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[28] Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 11-12.

[29] Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 41.

[30] This is the simplest and crudest understanding of the Kantian 'duty.'

seem to lack moral considerations. Actions are not undertaken in pursuit of self-fulfillment or self-actualization.[31] Thus the Greeks would rarely say, I presume, what seems to be one of the more popular lines in modern times: "I owe this to myself." To recognize the full force of the 'agency' of the citizen of the ancient epoch we need to look at the goals of citizenship as the Greeks understood it.

The Goal of Citizenship

The ancients have often been accused of not taking actions truly their own, that their actions are at best a fulfillment of their social (religious, political, familial) obligations. Thus Oedipus's acts are controlled first by the prophesies and later by the social codes of appropriateness and shame that cause him to pull out his eyes. Moreover, in *Nicomachaean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that the final end to human action is *eudaiemonia* which is an action undertaken for itself and not for the sake of something else.

> Honor, pleasure, reason and every other virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for even if nothing resulted from them we would still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of *eudaiemonia*, judging that through them we shall be happy. *Eudaiemonia* on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself.[32]

By living together in a *polis*, which is in accordance with a natural order of things, the citizens facilitate the good life or *eudaiemonia*. It is not that the *polis* assists its

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[31] In the study of the modern citizen we shall take up a more detailed discussion of what kinds of actions aide self-actualization and what kinds do not. Further ,we clarify the concept of self-actualisation. Here it is sufficient to mention that this business of self-actualization was not a concern for the Greeks.

[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachaean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81.

members to arrive at their own ideal lives, as the modern nation-state claims to do for

its citizens, but that by living together in a *polis*, the members of the *polis* are on the

right path to a good life. One of the elements of the good life is the care of the self,

epimeleia heautou. In fact it may be said that *epimeleia heautou*, more than *gnothi*

seauton (know thyself) "remained a fundamental principle for describing the

philosophical attitude throughout the Greek, Hellenistic and Roman culture."[33] The

care of the self or the art of living (a good life) can only be meditated upon in a *polis*.

As Foucault puts it, "it constituted not an exercise in solitude but a true social

practice."[34] It is an activity that can only be conducted in a school (also in the sense of

school of thought), or sect or a community "and not in the realm and form of the

universal."[35] Aristotle begins his *Politics* by reminding us that that the *polis* is a kind

of community, in fact a community of the highest order. The practice of the care of

the self can thus be conducted within the *polis* or within a network of communities

which are part of the *polis*. A member of these communities takes guidance or advice

from another member of the community. One of the important aspects of the care of

the self is that it cannot begin (or continue) without a teacher, guide or friend. This

kind of care of the self or the soul Foucault places at one end of the spectrum of a

tekhne tou biou (art of living). He places the activity of popular, religious or cultic

groups, where practices of the self are part of a ritualized order, at the other end of the

spectrum. However, the performance of those ritualized practices was part of the

process of a care of the self. While membership to the former type of community was

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[33] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-1982*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8.

[34] Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 3 vols., vol. 3, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 51.

[35] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-1982*, 117.

often a matter of the choice of a way of life (in that it found an expression in

friendship or membership to a philosophical school), membership to the latter type of

community was probably a matter of tradition.[36]

It is only in the extreme case of Diogenes and his followers, the Cynics, that a

> Complete shamelessness—learning to ignore others' negative reactions
> of disgust at one's appearance and behavior [becomes] the only true
> road to the self-sufficiency that is the distinguishing characteristic of
> the good human life.[37]

But even in the case of the Cynics, apolitical as they claimed to be, in the sense that

they did not want to follow the codes of the particular *polis* that they belonged to,

there is still an understanding that there is a pursuit of the good life, which can only be

located within the realm of a community. Diogenes, in rejecting the function of a *polis*

to reach him to the good life "coined the term *cosmopolitan*—'citizen of the

universe'" [38] to describe his membership to another kind of political community.

The Modern Epoch

> A declaration of the rights of man and the citizen, *the* declaration of the
> rights of man and the citizen (for in the strong sense there is only one,
> progressively elaborated in the course of history), is a radical
> discursive operation that deconstructs and reconstructs politics. It
> begins by taking democracy to its limits, in some sense *leaving* the
> field of instituted politics (this is the primary significance of the
> references to "human nature" or natural law), but in order to mark,

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[36] Here we need to distinguish tradition from birth because membership to what Foucault calls 'cults' or 'religious groups' may not necessarily be a function of being born into them, but rather being born into an ethos of the group, where only performance of the practices of the group can entitle one to membership of the group. Also see our earlier discussion on W. R. Connor and membership to the Greek *polis*.

[37] Raymond Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 27.

[38] Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods,* 29.

> immediately, that the rights of man have no reality and no value except as political rights, rights of the citizen, and even as the unlimited right of all men to citizenship. The right to autonomy and to the protection of 'private life' is itself a political right: this is the renewed lesson of the history of all modern dictatorships.[39]
>
> Etienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes and Ideas*

In '*What is a Politics of the Rights of Man?*' Balibar explains that the politics of the modern epoch at once conflates the private identity of man and his public identity as a citizen. This occurs because the private rights of man are now ensured within the political sphere. Man has a right to religion because the state deems itself secular and gives to man that right. Or man has a right to choose his own profession or spouse because the state has relegated such matters to the realm of the private which it will protect from itself. That is to say, if man is a citizen, he will have the 'rights' to a secure existence within what could be identified as 'private' sphere. It is also interesting to note that it is only with the modern epoch that the private existence of man and the public existence of the citizen come to be distinguished.[40] The idea of a public or private can only make sense with reference to the modern state. J. S. Mill, in his famous treatise *Liberty*, claims that 'public' refers to that part of an individual's actions which concern others; over his own mind and body he has complete sovereignty. While a whole tradition of liberal theorists have argued about what constitutes this divide between actions that affect others and actions which only affect oneself, the point that we wish to assert here is only that the distinction has come into being, and in a most powerful way.[41] This kind of a dual understanding of man's role

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[39] Balibar, *Masses, Classes and Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*, 211.

[40] See Benjamin Constant, *De L'esprit De Conquete* (Lausanne: Pierre-Marcel Favre, 1980).

[41] In an attempt to give a more concrete understanding to Mill's conception of public and private, C. L Ten has proposed a distinction between two spheres of action, "self regarding and other regarding." See *C.L Ten, Mill on Liberty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).* Theorists like F. A. Hayek and Raymond

in society has also been articulated as the distinction between state and civil society

(and also political society). Though the equation between public and private cannot

have a one-to-one correspondence with the equation between state and civil society,

there is a marked similarity between the two distinctions. David Held describes the

latter distinction thus: "civil society… is made up of areas of social life—the domestic

world, the economic sphere, cultural activities and political interactions—which are

organized by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups

outside the direct control of the state."[42] We can thus say that, while the state has

dominion over the public or political life of an individual, his civic or private affairs

cannot be interfered with. Unlike the modern state, the *polis* of the ancient regime

seemed to be (to put it in the language of the moderns), an all encompassing entity

that not only based citizenship on unequal anthropological factors, but also dictated

terms in all aspects of man's 'private life,' be it the sphere of religion or hygiene or

ethics. In a classic and still relevant study of the Greek state, A. C. Bradley writes:

> [T]he Greek knew little, either for good or evil, of the modern idea that
> the State is 'profane.' His religious feelings attached themselves to it.
> It was not merely the guardian of his property but also the source of
> right and goodness to him, the director of his worship and guarded by
> the gods he worshipped…. Thus, but for the occasional influence of

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Geuss problematize the simple distinction drawn between the public and the private, nevertheless
drawing their own lines of demarcation. See Friedrich Hayek, A., *The Constitution of Liberty* (London
and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). See also Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods*. Geuss in
fact argues "that there is no single clear distinction between public and private but rather a series of
overlapping contrasts, and thus that the distinction between the public and the private should not be
taken to have the significance often attributed to it." Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods*, 4.

[42] David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 281. Iris Marion
Young further refines non-state (and non-economic) associations into private, civic and political. See
Iris Marion Young, "State, Civil Society and Social Justice," in *Democracy's Value*, ed. Ian and
Casiano Hacker-Cordon Shapiro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

> the Delphic oracle, we may say that to the Greek citizen his State was
> the moral and religious law in one.[43]

The modern distinction between the public and the private is unclear,[44] but with the

Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, these two supposedly distinct domains

of human existence are conflated into one. The French revolution in claiming to

merge the identities of the man and the citizen actually rendered them as distinct

domains. Henceforth the only identity that would be of significance would be the

identity of the citizen. The identity of the citizen stands above other identities. So

much so that even Karl Marx says, "Human emancipation will only be complete when

the real individual has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen."[45] Marx's use of the

term 'human' here highlights the universalistic character of the concept of the citizen.

Universal Equality and Normalizing Identities

> The citizen is a man in enjoyment of all his 'natural' rights, completely
> realizing his individual humanity, a free man simply because he is
> equal to all other men…
>
> An eighteenth century dictionary had stated: "In France, other than the
> king, all are citizens. The revolution will say: If anyone is not a citizen,
> then no one is a citizen…."[46]
>
> Etienne Balibar, "Citizen Subject"

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[43] A. C Bradley, "Aristotle's Conception of the State," in *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics* ed. David Keyt and Jr. Fred Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1991), 17.

[44] For a clarification of the confusion between public and private see Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods*.

[45] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 41.

[46] Etienne Balibar, "Citizen Subject," in *Who Comes after the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava et al (New York: Routledge, 1991), 45..

Modern citizenship can only be what it is if it recognizes all citizens as equal and all

men as citizens. It rests firmly on the foundation of a minimal equality amongst all

men-citizens. Balibar identifies the defining principle of what he calls 'equaliberty'

within the politics of the modern epoch. Equaliberty, he says, implies three things:

  a) Politics is based on the recognition that freedom and equality cannot exist

     without each other

  b) Universality

  c) All have the right to politics and no one is above or outside of it.

The citizen, rather the modern post French Revolution citizen, can only be a

citizen when all other fellowmen are also citizens. He is a citizen along with all other

citizens and a citizen simply because all men are citizens by virtue of being equal

human beings. This sentiment was however not novel to the French Revolution,

though it was definitely highlighted by it. In a study of Thomas Hobbes and the

Levellers, C. B Macpherson summarizes the popular demand for civil and religious

liberty as one that was either for all, or for nobody.[47] The discourse of universality is,

as we have also seen in the previous chapter, a necessary condition for the survival of

the conceptual apparatus of citizenship in the modern epoch.

We have already mentioned that equality of all citizens does not refer to an

empirical state of being where all human beings are equal.[48] It does not even

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[47] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 145.

[48] Bernard Williams discusses the utterance 'all men are equal' thus: "it has only too often been pointed out that to say that all men are equal in all those characteristics in respect to which it makes sense to say that all men are equal or unequal, is a patent falsehood; and even if some restricted selection is made of these characteristics, the statement does not look much better. Faced with this obvious objection, the defender of the claim that all men are equal is likely to offer a weaker interpretation. It is not, he may say, in their skill, intelligence, strength, or virtue that men are equal, but merely in their

necessarily imply that the state will strive to achieve an equal status for all its citizens. To the extent that all people living within the territory of the nation-state are obliged to follow the same laws and have the same rights, they are considered equal. In saying that all citizens are equal we refer to the idea, which marks the politics of the modern epoch, that there is an obliteration of any identity other than that of the national one. This however does not immediately imply a 'normalization' of the kind that William Connolly and Macpherson fear. Connolly asserts that normalization is not necessarily a move against the individual; it is the delineation of certain identities as normal and the rest as irregularities, deformities, deviations, perversities, and so forth.[49] The evolution of the identity of the citizen is not a normalization of this kind, it is in fact the subsuming of all identities in the identity of the citizen. In the formation of the nation, with the declaration of the rights of man and citizen, the only identity that is retained is that of being a man and a citizen. The modern citizen is thus one who exhibits no markers of any other identity. This unmarked citizen is an anonymous statistic and in being so he is equal to every other citizen in a democracy.

However, as can be imagined, this anonymous, equal citizen of a modern democratic nation-state does not refer to a real person or a group of people or a particular section of society. It is a position, a location, a space that can be filled by anyone; a position invested with the power to determine how the state is governed.

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being men: it is their common humanity that constitutes their equality. On this interpretation we should not seek for some special characteristics in respect of which all men are equal, but merely remind ourselves that they are all men. Now to this it might be objected that being men is not a respect in which men can strictly speaking be said to be equal, but, leaving that aside, there is the more immediate objection that if all that the statement does is to remind us that men are men, it does not do very much, and in particular, does less its proponents in political argument have wanted it to do. What looked like a paradox has turned into a platitude." Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956 -1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

[49] William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 90..

Qualifying his argument that within a democracy a position of power is an 'empty

place,' Claude Lefort writes:

> Democratic society is as a society without a body, as a society which
> undermines the representation of an organic totality… in which the
> people, the nation and the state take on the status of universal entities,
> and in which any individual or group can be accorded the same
> status.[50]

It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that a citizen is an equal and universal entity

to which any particulars can aspire. So women can also ask for citizenship and so can

tall men and so can poets. Since it is positioned as a universal category its claim is

that it can be occupied by any and every particular, so long as he takes up the identity

of the citizen over his particular pre-citizen identity. Moreover once there comes into

being a nation-state and a citizen, all other identities can only be spoken of with

reference to the nation-state and the citizen. We could thus also say that the discourse

of the nation-state and citizen necessitates that all other discourse be filtered through

it.

But is this empty position truly an unmarked and empty one? Or does it have

hidden markers of normalization? One minimal requirement (or marker) of citizenship

is that of rationality, the ability to make choices 'rationally.' And this is perhaps what

is termed 'agency.' But not all actions and all choices are referred to as agential

actions. For example: if I chose to vote as per my husband's wishes, it would not be

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[50] Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 1988), 18.

considered an assertion of agency or a valid instantiation of choice.[51] What can

constitute a choice or an exercise of agency for a citizen needs careful study.

Agency and Autonomy: The Freedom to make (Rational) Choices

> We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge—and with good reason.[52]
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Along with equality, the concepts of agency, autonomy, freedom are unfailingly

invoked in any discussion of citizenship. The Greek citizen thus posits a puzzle

because he did not seem to exercise enough agency since he did not have sufficient

autonomy of action—his actions were too influenced (and sometimes even directed)

by other factors or agents. But within modern democratic theories, a citizen would be

one who possesses some kind of strong agency or autonomy of action, or 'dignity.'

One could speak of this autonomy either as the freedom to act or as the freedom from

impediments to action. The route of the action and/or its ends may be undecided and

unpredictable. As Charles Taylor puts it:

> It is obvious that [the] concept of dignity is the only one compatible
> with a democratic society…. Among other features, this view [of
> liberalism] understands human dignity to consist largely in autonomy,
> that is in the ability of each person to determine for himself or herself a
> view of the good life.[53]

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[51] We can list several such actions which are not considered "choices" within democracy—a choice to kill (oneself or another), a choice to vote for money, a choice to follow a "tradition" and so on.

[52] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1969), 15.

[53] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 245.

According to Taylor, the citizen of a democracy will strive to maximize his freedom so that he is able to achieve or realize his full potential. He will try to maximize the spheres of activity where he is more and more free, where intervention of the state is minimal or absent and where there is the least hindrance to his self-fulfilment. On this premise, studies in democracy concentrate largely on how citizens maximize their autonomy and hence speak of representation and identity politics, deliberation, free market economy, participation, and so on. The preliminary question of why citizens need to maximize their autonomy needs to be asked. Or rather why are modern theories of politics based on the premise that agents maximize freedom or autonomy? What is it that makes autonomy and freedom such desirable qualities, considered in most cases to be necessary conditions for a healthy democracy?

Taylor, for one, would claim that autonomy is necessary so that the citizen can realize his true potential and thus become in some ways a self-actualized individual. This particular view of the individual is common to the liberals and the communitarians. Though the communitarians emphasize the individual's social or community ties, they share the liberal understanding of individual agency.

A modern individual would typically think, say about the activity of dancing: I know I can dance. I have the ability and desire to dance. When I am allowed to dance, or not prevented from dancing, I can truly realize myself. If I am prevented from dancing, I experience myself as an incomplete self. That is to say, in order that I experience myself as complete, I have to be allowed to dance so that the dancer hidden away in me can be realized. The ancient Greeks (and several others from cultures where the idea of the self is not such) would find it difficult to conceptualize this self that has an *a priori* notion of herself as a dancer. One can only be a dancer in

the act of dancing, or after one dances. The idea that one is not a dancer when one doesn't dance is incongruent with the modern conception of the self as capable of possessing a certain conception of itself, a conception that it feels compelled to fulfill. There is a sense of incompleteness and disempowerment when one is not allowed to fulfill one's conception of one's self. But what is this self that thinks of a person who doesn't dance as a dancer?

According to the modern conception, all people, irrespective of actual ability, are equally able to think of themselves as dancers. For some this desire to dance may be a weak one, one that would not lead to the loss of a sense of self-actualization if not fulfilled; and for others it may be a strong one, one that informs self-understanding and thus would need to be fulfilled. While all individuals have the potential to realize themselves by fulfilling their desires, the *nature* of these desires is two-tiered. Harry Frankfurt speaks of desires of the first order and desires of the second order. The desires of the first order are the desires to "simply do or not do one thing or another,"[54] whereas second-order desires are what a person has "when he wants to have or not to have a certain desire of the first order."[55] Only human beings exhibit a capability for reflective self-evaluation in the form of second-order desires. All desires of the second order are, however, not consubstantial with the will of the individual.

> Someone has a desire of the second order when he wants simply to
> have a certain desire or *when he wants a certain desire to be his will*.
> In situations of the latter kind, I shall call his second-order desires
> 'second order volitions' or volitions of the second order.' Now it is

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[54] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 12.

[55] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 13.

> having second order volitions, and not second-order desires generally
> that I regard as essential to being a person (emphasis added).[56]

The second order volitions are reflective and manifest the free will. Hence they are real desires, as opposed to the desires of the first order, which are irrational and mere impulses or instincts.[57] The second order volitions are in some ways a check on first order desires, and a reflection on second-order desires. Real freedom is thus as Frankfurt explains it, not the ability to do whatever one wants to do but rather a freedom to want what one actually wants to want.

> The enjoyment of a free will means the satisfaction of certain desires—
> desires of the second or higher orders—whereas their absence means
> their frustration. The satisfactions at stake are those which accrue to a
> person of whom it may be said that his will is his own. The
> corresponding frustrations are those suffered by a person of whom it
> may be said that he is estranged from himself.[58]

Thus about our dancer we may say, if her desire to dance was merely impulsive, its fulfillment or non-fulfillment would not have implications for her freedom. Real freedom is the freedom to know that what she wants to want to do is dance. In doing so she is an agent and a person. She exercises freedom of choice, which is the freedom of the individual will. Freedom has been granted to her purely because she possesses the capacity for introspective reflection, or what Taylor calls 'strong evaluation.' The individual is thus an agent in the sense that she can account for her preferences in a way that goes beyond merely saying she has made a choice because she likes what she has chosen as opposed to what she hasn't.

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[56] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 16.

[57] Frankfurt explains that agents possessing second-order desires but not volitions of the second order are merely 'wantons' and should not even be considered 'persons.'

[58] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 22.

> To be a strong evaluator is thus to be capable of a reflection which is more articulate. But it is also in an important sense deeper…Strong evaluation is not just a condition of articulacy about preferences but also about the quality of life, the kinds of beings we are or want to be. It is in this sense deeper.[59]

Since all men are said to possess a capacity for reflective and evaluative choice, they are to be endowed with freedom and treated as equal citizens in the nation-state. The state endows each individual with citizenship because he possesses the qualities of dignity, rationality, and moral autonomy. Various theories of democracy assert that democracy can only function with an aware, autonomous, responsible citizen. This is the citizen who makes choices based on his higher order desires. An impulsive action or an unaccountable choice is incongruous with the theory of democracy. Thus, to ask why the desire to kill, or on a more moderate note, why the decision to vote for money is not considered a legitimate choice within a democracy would be to ask why we do not have the freedom to fulfill first order desires. The answer to this is not very difficult: first order desires are not real desires but merely impulses. It is a caricature of freedom to ask for the freedom to kill, to vote for money, or to be an irresponsible citizen. Democracy, in its modern conception, can only function with rational, autonomous agents making evaluative choices based on his higher-order desires.

Michael Oakeshott presents a scathing critique of this rationality in the politics of the modern period. In his essay 'Rationalism in Politics,' Michael Oakeshott outlines two characteristics of rationalist politics: the politics of perfection and the politics of uniformity.[60] These two characteristics are in effect one thing: there is only one 'best' and that best should be applicable everywhere. He caricatures the rationalist

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[59] Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 25-26.

[60] Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1962), 5.

disposition as one which "stands for independence of mind…for thought free from all authority save the authority of reason." While this is an extreme and advanced case of rationalism, Oakeshott's critique of the rationalist tendency should be taken seriously. Politics of the modern period is built on the foundation of rationalism and the extreme case (and thus also the *telos*) of this rationalism can only be the destruction of all knowledge that rationalism sees as 'traditional' or 'non-rational.'

Furthermore, the modern citizen of a democracy actively participates in the functioning of that democracy. The business of government is no longer the domain of experts or statesmen but of the everyman, of all citizens. However, the ideal of universal participation also has a clause. Carole Pateman writes that contemporary democratic theory would consider certain people's participation 'dangerous' for a democracy since they possess personality traits that can be called 'authoritarian' or 'undemocratic,' whereas participatory theory would argue that an active participation in the processes of a democracy would foster a 'democratic' personality. Pateman defines a democratic personality as one having "qualities needed for the successful operation of the democratic system."[61] How Pateman would demarcate qualities that are democratic or authoritarian or otherwise is not clear. That these qualities, which are required for the smooth functioning of a democracy, are not intrinsic is hinted at when she says that they can be cultivated or fostered, but Pateman doesn't elaborate on the qualities that make a person democratic. It may thus seem that a commonsensical notion of a good-natured, friendly, participatory, one-of-the-boys person is being spoken of when Pateman refers to a 'democratic personality.'

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[61] Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 64.

Returning to the question of choices, which seems to occupy centre space in any discussion of democracy, it may be said that in making responsible and evaluated choices the citizen operates in a manner such that he can maximize individual or common good or, as Taylor puts it, "determine[s] for himself or herself a view of the good life."[62] This idea of a good life is unqualified and defined by each individual for himself or by each community for itself. Each individual or community has a salient conception of what a good life means to him/it and in pursuing it he/it will actualize himself/itself. At this juncture one comes across a phenomenon prolific in democratic societies: identity politics. Several people may have a similar conception of the good life and what it entails. For example, women would have a different notion of the good life from men; and the idea of the good life that the working class have would be different one from the good life that the bourgeoisie talks of. Hence the only way to operate a democratic state is to facilitate deliberation and negotiation between all these groups so that they can persuade each other about their view of the good life. While this does not entirely explain the emergence of identity politics, or even the coming together of interest groups, it should be noted that this process is a strong mobilizer of identity politics in a democratic society. The emergence of identity, or the discourse of identity, as it were, may be attributed to the instability of the identity of the citizen, which we shall now turn to.

The Instability of the Modern Identity

The rational agential individual and the abstract unmarked citizen are both postulates that the real individual cannot identify with. That is to say, the citizen of the modern

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[62] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism And "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 57.

democracy is not even an idealized person, but rather what Claude Lefort describes as

an 'empty place':

> [In a modern democracy] The locus of power is an empty place, it
> cannot be occupied—it is such that no individual and no group can be
> consubstantial with it—and it cannot be represented.[63]

To this empty position, democratic theories attribute certain characteristics. The self

that forms the basis for democratic theory constitutes an autonomous individual

capable of a complex layering of desires, possessing a free will that enables it to

choose rationally amongst these desires. This self exists prior to the choices that it

makes, just as the dancer thinks of herself as a dancer even before she starts dancing.

But this self cannot be represented since it is not a *real* person. Thus it is essential for

this self to manifest itself as an identity, though it is still unclear what this identity

refers to. Furthermore, it is also unclear how the self assumes an identity. Here one

recognizes the trouble theorists of identity politics have in understanding what

identity actually refers to. For one would not want to claim that one's identity as a

banker is similar to one's identity as a woman. Or that one's identity as a short person

is in any way as crucial as one's national, ethnic or linguistic identity. At this point the

identity theorists would try to distinguish between 'natural identity' and 'political

identity,' claiming that while the former is an experiential category, the latter is a

mere strategic formation. Amy Gutmann for example, differentiates between interest

groups and identity groups.[64] However, once one speaks of a metaphysical self, it is

unclear how this metaphysical self can take on an identity that it experiences. To pose

the question differently: Is identity that which the self experiences, or that which the

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[63] Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, 17.

[64] Amy Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

self takes on? For if there is an understanding of a self existing prior to its own

experience, its identity cannot be that which it experiences. Returning to our dancer,

we may ask: Since her identity as a dancer is taken on prior to the act of dancing, can

this identity be described as an experiential identity? To ask then of the experience of

a citizen, is to thus ask a question that is unintelligible. The politics of the modern

epoch is like the modern citizen: an abstraction, a purely theoretical postulate. Given

the built-in instability of the politics of the modern epoch, it slips into the post-

modern epoch. The politics of the modern epoch preempts the politics of the post-

modern epoch, the politics of representation or the politics of identity.

The Masks of Post-Modern Identities

> MRS. SMITH**:** Why, Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson,
> the late Bobby Watson's other uncle.
>
> MR. SMITH: No, it's not that one, it's someone else. It's Bobby
> Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's aunt.[65]
>
> <div align="right">Eugene Ionesco, The Bald Soprano</div>

The citizen of the modern period does not exist. It is an abstraction, an empty

position—not an identity with which people can relate to each other. One can give

some form to this abstract citizen only within the realm of the politics of

representation. While Balibar correctly identifies this moment as one that is marked

by the politics of identity, we have amply demonstrated that, unclear as they are, these

identities are not the identities of the ancient epoch. The instability of the category of

the citizen enables, and necessitates, the proliferation of other kinds of identities in the

post-modern period. However, it is difficult to say how they constitute themselves.

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[65] Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano and Other Plays* (Grove Press, 1982), 3.

Though they are commonly mobilized as experiential identities, we have seen in the previous section that the self takes on an identity even before it experiences it. What then is this identity? To take up this question would be to meander far away from our original question, and perhaps in vain. At this juncture, it would be sufficient to show that the understanding of identities within different political epochs differs greatly. The identities in the ancient period were based on an understanding of the 'natural world' and in that sense were natural identities. The identities in the modern period are also necessary identities, but in a completely different sense; they are necessary to give stability to the category of the citizen. Balibar claims that in the post-modern period, identities *return* to the political realm. The identities in the post-modern period are however very new identities, in the sense that they have not been relational units prior to the advent of identity politics. These identities have not existed prior to the discourse of citizenship, it is only post-nation-state and post-citizenship that these identities have become discursive units.

We have demonstrated the instability of the discourse of citizenship in the modern Western political context. The abstract citizen latches itself on to what Balibar calls 'post-modern identities.' The ancient epoch does not exhibit any phenomenon that can be called citizenship, though there is a more complex multilayered process of membership to a political community. But Balibar's retrospective understanding of identity and citizenship is not in any way an isolated failure. It is in fact representative of an entire tradition of legitimating political power that Foucault refers to as the 'historico-political discourse.' Though primarily employed by the nobility to justify their relationship to the land, this discourse, taking root in the European tradition, eventually becomes a "discursive tactic, a deployment

of knowledge and power which, insofar as it is a tactic, is transferable and eventually

becomes the law governing the formation of a knowledge and, at the same time, the

general form of the political battle."[66] Thus the politics of identity is but one kind of

historico-political discourse claiming that the identity in question has always existed

and possesses certain characteristics. For example, the politics of gender would claim

that women as an identity group have always been marginalized and excluded from

the process of governance and thus need to be considered and represented in

contemporary politics.

How to Become a Citizen in a Few Simple Steps

The discourse of citizenship in the modern period draws on the concept of man as a

choosing subject, or a subject possessing a will to choose.[67] The notion of choice is

not simply a matter of stating a preference or making a random choice—we have seen

how making a choice to cheat or kill is not considered a legitimate exercise of

choice—but making choices based on 'volitions of the second order.' Frankfurt

argues:

> It is *logically possible, however unlikely, that there should be an agent*
> *with second-order desires but with no volitions of the second order.*
> Such a creature, in my view, would not be a person. I shall use the term
> 'wanton' to refer to agents who have first-order desires but who are not
> persons because, whether or not they have desires of the second order,
> they have no second-order volitions (emphasis added). [68]

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[66] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 190.

[67] My understanding and explication of the subject of democracy owes much to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality.*

[68] Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16.

The minimal requirement for citizenship is to be a 'person,' but we may now

appreciate that it is not a very simple qualification. A person is one who has second-

order volitions. The idea of the will (*voluntas*) that is central to the understanding of

these second-order volitions, we have already discussed above and in the second

chapter, is a theological one. From St Augustine to Harry Frankfurt, the concept of

choice has been linked to the freedom of will. As Dihle elaborates:

> St Augustine interpreted freedom of choice, traditionally attributed to
> all rational beings, as the freedom of will….The direction of the will,
> however, is thought and spoken of as being independent of the
> cognition for the better and the worse….It is not surprising that
> everything, in the view of St. Augustine, depends on *voluntas* in
> religious and moral life[69]

The idea of the will that forms the basis of the understanding of the person and hence

the citizen, even in its secular form is opaque and unintelligible. And yet the discourse

of citizenship continues to inform Indian political discourse. What Frankfurt contends

is an 'unlikely' proposition—of having second-order desires and yet no second-order

volitions—is realized in the discourse on Indian citizenship. An Indian person may be,

for Frankfurt, distinguishable from an animal, in that he can articulate his desire for a

first-order desire. However he falls short of being a person because he does not

possess a free will—the will is a deeply theological postulate. While one can try to

make some sense of this theological postulate in the case of Christian Europe, the

difficulty of finding empirical support for it in India makes the Indian political

discourse's use of Western concepts peculiarly unstable and polysemic. In fact,

returning to the theme set in the introduction, we may now be able to say that

citizenship too is a conceptless term in Indian political discourse.

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[69] Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, 129.

Citizenship and Political Rationality

> Now, an important phenomenon occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the appearance—one should say the invention— of a new mechanism of power which had very specific procedures, completely new instruments, and very different equipment. It was, I believe, absolutely incompatible with relations of sovereignty. This new mechanism of power applies primarily to bodies and what they do….It was a type of power that was exercised through constant surveillance….It was a type of power that presupposed a closely meshed grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign, and it therefore defined a new economy of power based upon the principle that there had to be an increase both in the subjugated forces and in the force and efficacy of that which subjugated them….This non-sovereign power, which is foreign to the form of sovereignty, is 'disciplinary' power.[70]
>
> <div align="right">Michel Foucault, Society Must Be Defended</div>

The discourse of citizenship is part of the story of sovereignty, which is concerned with the legitimation of political power. With the modern rational citizen, the political power vested in him is legitimated as the exercise of the individual will. This citizen is an abstraction and hence an unstable entity requiring the predication of an identity. Thus we have located the paradox of democracy—the necessary coexistence of identity and citizenship—within the discourse of sovereignty.

Modern states are, however, not concerned as much with the legitimation of power, as with the survival and growth of the state itself. The survival and growth of the state necessitates a different kind of 'political rationality'—the implementation of power or the technologies of governance. This Michel Foucault refers to as the 'disciplinary' power of the state or what was called 'police' in the seventeenth and

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[70] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, 35-36.

eighteenth century.[71] Police however includes everything. It controls every aspect of

the life of the citizen subject and it is in this sense totalitarian. But the totalitarian

control of the police-state was "from an extremely particular point of view"[72] and had

certain defined aims; its primary interest being the survival and expansion of the state.

Foucault argues that this power was "radically heterogeneous and should logically

have led to the complete disappearance of the great juridical edifice of the theory of

sovereignty." But the theory of sovereignty survives in the modern epoch by

organizing itself within a historic-political discourse as the discourse of the rights of

the citizen. Thus political rationality in the modern period operates on two axes. The

theory of sovereignty, which creates and recreates the subjectivity of the modern

rational citizen as a rights-bearing individual, forms the first axis. The totalitarian

disciplinary power, or the mechanics of the power of the state, forms the second axis.

Furthermore, the expansion of the state through political rationality requires the

production of a certain kind of knowledge. As Foucault explains:

> Government therefore entails more than just implementing general
> principles of reason, wisdom, and prudence. Knowledge is necessary;
> concrete, precise, and measured knowledge as to the state's strength.
> The art of governing, characteristic of reason of state, is intimately
> bound up with the development of what was then called either political
> *statistics,* or *arithmetic;* that is, the knowledge of different states'
> respective forces. Such knowledge was indispensable for correct
> government.[73]

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[71] Foucault explains that the term 'police' here is not to be understood as the modern institution for enforcing order but rather as a "governmental technology peculiar to the state; domains, techniques, targets where the state intervenes." Michel Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason'," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Stanford University: 1979), 246.

[72] Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason," 248.

[73] Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason," 245-246.

While political theory largely concerns itself with the discourse of sovereignty, and hence with the modern citizen as a rational choosing subject, modern government operates on the three axes of sovereignty, discipline and governmentality.

The Discourse of Citizenship in India

The Indian discourse of citizenship too seems to be constituted largely within the story of sovereignty. But as our discussion has made clear, Indian political discourse cannot travel along the trajectory of the discourse of sovereignty. One reason why, despite this, the discourses of the citizen and the nation-state continue to thrive in the Indian context is the tendency of the historico-political discourse, once embedded in political discourse as a discursive tactic—a tactic that erases all memory of its initial tactical nature—to generalize and universalize itself such that it becomes not only a legitimation of politics but also a legitimation of knowledge and knowledge production. Can the tactical historico-political discourse take root in India, where even the minimal conditions for the intelligibility of the discourse of sovereignty—of which the historic-political discourse is an offshoot—are absent? What could the presence of this discourse in India imply? We can identify two narratives of citizenship in Indian political theory; two groups that we have discussed at some length in the first chapter but, having examined the discourses of citizenship and identity within Balibar's frame, can now return to.

The first story is the dominant narrative of citizenship in India. It begins with the setting up of the Indian nation-state. Bipin Chandra marks 15th August 1947 as the "first stop, the first break [from] centuries of backwardness…," the point at which the promises of the Indian freedom struggle would be fulfilled and the people's hopes

would be realized. The hopes of the people were the dreams of the citizens of the new

nation-state. The independent nation-state conferred onto its members the gift of

citizenship—the rights it entails and the duties it implies. Enshrined in the

constitution, this became the official doctrine of citizenship. The speeches of Nehru

and Jinnah can be seen as representative of this discourse of citizenship. Under the

masks of the official directive of citizenship, however, is revealed a more familiar

reformist agenda—annihilating the caste-system and communalism, eradicating

poverty, abolishing superstition, building dams—in short, what we call modernizing.

The modernizing discourse of citizenship constructs itself as opposed to the

'traditional'— that which it seeks to replace with education, scientific spirit,

secularism, and so on. The idea of citizenship operative within this discourse is based

on a Western model of citizenship, though the colonial legacy of this discourse (or

that of the nation-state) is vehemently denied in an ardent nationalist fervor. The

nationalist discourse is, however, merely a repackaging of the colonial binaries of the

savage and the civilized (read East and West) as tradition and modernity. Thus all that

the colonials condemned as uncivilized was rejected by the nationalists as tradition.

And to civilize and modernize the Indian people they were given the 'gift' of

citizenship. But how does a people give to itself citizenship?[74] What legitimates the

rights and duties etched in the constitution?[75]

    Another story of citizenship, one that refutes the idea of universal citizenship in

the Indian context, is told by the Subaltern Collective. The Subaltern Collective

[74] In India citizenship is granted by the Constitution of India. But the Constitution reads like a magician's chant that will make something appear out of nothing.

[75] See the discussion of Nehru and Indian constitutionalism in the first chapter. Also see Uday Singh Mehta, "Indian Constitutionalism: The Articulation of a Political Vision," in *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition*, ed. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

rejects the modernizing story as 'the cunning of the elite,' or the appropriation of a people's movement by the elite. The mass movements of the people eventually give way to the bourgeois charade of citizenship. The formation of the nation and the existence of citizens then becomes the statist position against the subaltern struggles of the people. Citizenship in this story is the privilege of the elite.

With the first narrative it is unclear how citizenship is installed, since none of the characteristics of the citizen of Western political discourse can be found in the Indian people. In fact, the constitution attempts to instill these characteristics in the Indian people by making them equal citizens. With the second narrative citizenship is articulated as the one thing that it cannot be: an identity. Citizenship, far from remaining an empty space or location, becomes one more identity that some people may possess and others may not.[76]

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[76] It is ironic that the subaltern studies group lauds people for not being citizens of the Indian nation. The nation, they claim, is established by a compromised bourgeois passive revolution and thus those who offer resistance to it, actively or passively, are the hope for a real democracy. One group that does in fact resist the nation is the 'political society.' What is this political society? Does it offer a concept? This political society consists of "associations of squatters, encroachers on public property, ticket-less travellers on public transport, habitual defaulters of civic taxes, unauthorized users of electricity, water, or other such public utilities, and other such violators of civic regulations." Partha Chatterjee, "Democracy and State Violence," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol 2:1 (April 2001): 177. But is travelling ticketless, violation of civic rules, and defaulting taxes a uniquely subaltern activity? Or is it more likely to be found among the old category of landlords and bourgeoisie? One may thus conclude from Chatterjee's account that most of the people in India are not citizens of the nation-state.

Chapter 4

Instructions of History: Legitimating Membership to Political Communities

'Incidentally, I despise everything which merely instructs me without increasing or immediately enlivening my activity.' These are Goethe's words. With them, as with a heartfelt expression of *Ceterum censeo* (I judge otherwise)*,* our consideration of the worth and the worthlessness of history may begin.[1]

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*

The central categories of our political investigation, the nation-state and its cognates are a product of a particular historical ontology[2]—that of the West. The discourse of sovereignty that constitutes these categories has simultaneously also constituted the subjects of the nation-state as autonomous choosing subjects. These subjects or the citizens of the nation-state render intelligibility to the discourse of the nation-state while being subject to its privileges and disciplinary techniques. Given this, how do we understand our contemporary political reality? How do we speak of our community and our membership to it? How do we understand ourselves as subjects of our own past? It may seem that the only way we can do so is to represent ourselves in our own history.

But what is this history? Is it our understanding of our past? Is it our relationship to the past? Or is it how we represent ourselves as subjects of our past?

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), Foreword.

[2] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, *Essential Works of Foucault: 1954-1984* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 316, 318.

History as a Means of Instruction

> The *lessons from the past* provide the instruction as to how the best sort of citizen should act, but the same historical event can furnish different lessons at different times, in the best tradition of rhetoric.[3]
>
> > Frances Pownall, *Lessons from the Past*

> [P]ast was sanctified through tradition. Tradition preserved the past by handing down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors, who had first witnessed and created the sacred founding.[4]
>
> > Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*

In the previous chapter we mentioned W.R. Connor's study of the *Origin of Citizenship in Ancient Athens*. Connor's study alerted us to the fact that citizenship in Athens was not merely a matter of being born into a community (though he does not deny that to be born into the Athenian society,[5] and no other, was also a crucial matter in determining membership to Athens) but more a matter of "participation in cults, festivals and ceremonies."[6] The participation in what we can loosely call 'cultural activities' of Athens allowed for the creation and recreation of a 'civic identity,' which in a sense determined membership to a community. Since we have already noted that this membership is not based on the dialectic of rights and duties, let us assume that membership was based on continuing those practices that played a significant role in determining a person's membership to the community in the first

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[3] Frances Pownall, *Lessons from the Past: The Moral Use of History in Fourth Century Prose* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 7.

[4] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 124.

[5] Here we should also clarify the distinction between being born into a community (say the Athenian *polis*) and being born on the territory of Athens. While membership to the ancient Greek *polis* was based on the former, the latter is usually the main requirement for citizenship to the modern nation-state.

[6] W. R. Connor, *The Origins of Citizenship in Ancient Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 41.

place. What were these practices, the performance of which was so crucial to the survival of the community? How were these practices transmitted to and learnt by the members-to-be? We shall begin by answering the second question and, in the process of elaborating the answer, we shall try to find some clues to the first.

History or the instruction that it provides become, as it were, a way of imbibing the cultural practices of the community. But this is to say nothing at all. That history provides 'lessons from the past' is a truism. That it should perform the same function for the ancient Greeks is not a fact that deserves a more emphatic mention. Frances Pownell, in her book titled *Lessons from the Past*, sets out to investigate some of the ancient historians and the kind of lessons that they provide. On examining the 'historical' writings of Plato, Isocrates, Xenophon, Ephorus and Theopompus, Pownall notes—and here is where we register that the lessons of ancient history differ a little from those of modern history—that ancient history was more given to instruction than modern history. Pownall notes the instructional character of the narratives of the ancients and in an almost exasperated conclusion states that the historians of the ancient world were too eager to draw moral lessons out of their observation of their past. She thinks that these narratives violate even the minimal criterion of historical writing, that is, faithfulness to the events of the past. In a detailed study of a variety of histories of the ancient period, Pownall draws more or less the same conclusion about each one of them. In a discussion of *Menexenus*, Plato's critique of the Attic orators, she says:

> I conclude my examination of the ways in which the Attic orators use
> the historical example to create a democratic view of the past. It is
> possible, however, to make some general observations on the way the
> orators distort history. First, there is a tendency to give generalized
> versions of events, which in turn allows them to be used in a more

versatile way. Second, although there are certain accepted *topoi*, these are by no means fixed, as the orators can modify them in order to fit the case they want to argue, giving their own interpretation to the facts. Third, there is a distinct (and natural) Athenian bias in allusions to the past. The orators play up Athens' successes and either omit reverses (and other unflattering material) altogether or distort them in such a way as to emphasize Athenian courage and altruism. Finally there is the common use of popular tradition in order to pander to a mass audience even when the actual facts are available.[7]

Of Plato himself she writes:

Plato himself recognized the power of the spoken word to transform an audience's perception of a historical event and was not averse to harnessing some of its power to its own ends. The difference is that Plato considered his manipulation of words to be justified because it was for the purpose of moral instruction rather than the flattery of the masses…. Plato uses historical exempla with no more interest in *akribeia* than the orators…. Plato's disregard for strict historical truth is perhaps best illustrated by his frequent and emphatic use of anachronism.[8]

And of Xenophone's *Hellenica:*

Nevertheless Xenophone is more interested in the moral lessons to be gained from historical events than in preserving an accurate record of the past, and throughout the *Hellenica* he omits, postpones or underemphasizes important political and military developments in order to provide a better or a more dramatic moral lesson.[9]

Similarly, of Ephorus's *History*, she notes:

Occasionally, however, Ephorus's preoccupation with the moral instruction causes him to break even his own very sensible rules not to write on the mythological period…. By breaking this rule, Ephorus

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[7] Pownall, *Lessons from the Past: The Moral Use of History in Fourth Century Prose*, 44-45.

[8] Pownall, *Lessons from the Past: The Moral Use of History in Fourth Century Prose*, 46-47.

[9] Pownall, *Lessons from the Past: The Moral Use of History in Fourth Century Prose*, 110.

passes off the fantastic tales of the poets as accurate accounts of the past.[10]

Pownall's distress on reading the histories written by her ancient colleagues is apparent and, to some extent, understandable; though, as I hope to demonstrate, not completely justified. What disturbs Pownall about the fact that these histories are not so interested in the truth about the past as they are in providing instructions and guidelines is not that there is a moral lesson—even a modern history may have a moral lesson—but that so many (perhaps, most of the) ancient historians have compromised truth and verity for moral instruction. History did not even minimally record accurately events of the past. Why were the ancient historians not able to present, in their histories, the truth about the past?[11]

The ancient historians were, so to speak, poets gripped by flamboyant storytelling. Even their accounts of the past are colored by fictionalized accounts and poetic excesses. These narratives and histories are merely untreated accounts that need to be processed by the critical tools of the modern historian. It is thus the task of the modern historian to reconstruct from all these biased, extravagant and didactic accounts, secular modern histories and determine which of the ancient histories

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[10] Pownall, *Lessons from the Past: The Moral Use of History in Fourth Century Prose*, 140.

[11] Pownall is not alone in her opinion of the histories of the ancients. Even as early as the Renaissance, ancient historians were sneered at for their fantastic accounts of the past. Sir Philip Sidney, in his *An Apology for Poetry* writes "historiographers, although their lips sound of things done, and verity be written in their foreheads, have been glad to borrow both fashion and, perchance, weight of the poets; so Herodotus entitled the books of his history by the names of the Nine Muses; …describing… the many particularities of battles which no man could affirm; or, if that be denied me, long orations, put in the mouths of great kings and captains, which it is certain they never pronounced." And if he was not done with the ancient historian yet, he writes "The historian scarcely gives leisure to the moralist to say so much, but that he (laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself, for the most part, upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay, having much ado to accord differing writers, and to pick truth out of partiality….." Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. R. W. Maslen (London: Barnes and Noble, 1973), 43, 78.

presented a democratic view of the past and which ones did not. Pownall posits her study as a point of departure for such an exercise.

While it is true that modern history itself has not been able to speak of absolute *facts* without qualifying them as produced by a specific individual in a specific geographical and temporal location,[12] modern historians would agree with E.H. Carr that there are some "so-called basic facts which are the same for all historians."[13] These facts are the "raw material of the historian rather than of history itself."[14] Even after Roland Barthes's pronouncement that history is narrative, the business of history still needs to be distinguished from the pleasure of fiction writing. And that which distinguishes the two is the element of fact—fact that is verifiable within the method of the discipline of history. Even within the new subjectivity, there is still an expressed interest in finding out and documenting the truth about one's own past. The modern historian who is aware of his location and its frailties is still committed to investigating, to put it in Leopold von Ranke's memorable phrase, "the past as it really was."[15] However, the histories of the ancients had no such obligation to verity. Thus we distinguish the histories written by the ancients from the discipline of modern history primarily by the way in which each history understands the 'raw material' of its enterprise. The modern historian is bound to verify his material. Once the dreary task is done, he is free to choose from the basket of facts that is available to him, narrativise, emplot and tell a story about the past. The ancient historian was free

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[12] See Edward Hallet Carr, *What Is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 8.

[13] Carr, *What Is History?*, 8.

[14] Carr, *What Is History?*, 9.

[15] Leopold von Ranke, *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations, 1494-1514*, trans. Phillip A. Ashworth (Kessinger Publications, 2004).

from any responsibility even to the verity of the fact. Moreover, the stories of the

ancient historian now become the 'primary material' for the modern historian.

Truth, Integrity, and 'National' Histories

> These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes, *in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the Barbarians from losing their due meed of glory; and withal to put on record what were their grounds of feuds*. According to the Persians best informed in history, the Phoenicians began to quarrel. Such is the account which the Persians give of these matters. They trace to the attack upon Troy their ancient enmity towards the Greeks. The Phoenicians, however, as regards Io, vary from the Persian statements. They deny that they used any violence to remove her into Egypt...*Whether this latter account be true, or whether the matter happened otherwise, I shall not discuss further.* I shall proceed at once to point out the person who first within my own knowledge inflicted injury on the Greeks, after which I shall go forward with my history.[16]
>
> > Herodotus, *The Histories*

> I would have every man apply his mind seriously to consider these points, viz., what their life and what their manners were; through what men and by what measures, both in peace and in war, their empire was acquired and extended; then, as discipline gradually declined, let him follow in his thoughts their morals, at first as slightly giving way, anon how they sunk more and more, then began to fall headlong, until he reaches the present times, when we can endure neither our vices nor their remedies. This it is which is particularly salutary and profitable in the study of history, *that you behold instances of every variety of conduct displayed on a conspicuous monument; that thence you may select for yourself and for your country that which you may imitate; thence note what is shameful in the undertaking, and shameful in the result, which you may avoid* (emphasis added).[17]
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> > Titus Livy, *The Early Histories of Rome*

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[16] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. G. C. Macaulay and Donald Lateiner (London: Barnes & Noble Classics Series, 2004), 3.

[17] Titus Livy, *Livy: The Early History of Rome, Books I-V*, trans. Aubrey De Selincourt (Penguin Classics, 2002), Preface.

The modern reader's frustration with the ancient historians' disregard for facts may perhaps be unwarranted, since it is not that the ancient historian was unable to distinguish what actually happened from what he recorded in his histories, but rather that he chose 'not to discuss [it] further.' The seemingly recalcitrant assertion of an indifference to finding out what was actually true, according to several readers of ancient histories, serves merely to promote factional and communal histories. Bruce James Smith writes that history for the ancients was not "a universal history, which would seek to tell the saga of all human action. Rather, it is what Collingwood has called 'a national history where the hero is the spirit of the people.'"[18] Livy presents a systematic method, as it were, of writing such a 'national' history. He explains how this arduous endeavor that he has undertaken is a useful enterprise. With the help of a study of various events in the rise and fall of Rome, one may be able to decide which events or actions are desirable for the country and which are not. The actions that are desirable should be recorded, imitated and indurated through practice and ones that are shameful should be avoided and obliterated from the memory of the people and thus also from history. In this sense, indeed, histories could only be 'national histories,' 'communal histories' or 'sectarian histories,' for anything else would not be a history at all.

By the time we reach the medieval period the national histories have already become the histories of the monarch, in whom the nation is located. Michel Foucault locates the traditional function of the histories in the Middle Ages upon three axes:[19]

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[18] Bruce James Smith, *Politics and Remembrance: Republican Themes in Machiavelli, Burke, and Tocqueville* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 28.

[19] Foucault identifies a continuity between Roman history and medieval history and identifies the above as the functions of the historical discourse of the Middle Ages, which was similar to the political function that histories of the Roman society performed, namely, to reinforce sovereignty.

(i) a genealogical function that would magnify the name of kings and princes with all that went before them, (ii) a memorialization function which were to be found in the annals and chronicles, and (iii) an intensifying function performed by putting examples in circulation. An example, Foucault says "is a living law or a resuscitated law."[20] History of the Greco-Roman period up to the medieval ages was a ritual of legitimating the sovereignty of the sovereign. It reinforced and recreated sovereignty each day by chanting history. The ideal was created through history and so history did not have to tell the truth about the past but extract true ideals from the past—the ideals of a just sovereign, of an obedient people, of patriotism and so on. So history was true if it was true to the sovereign. And the truth of the sovereign? That did not depend on history. History was subordinated to the sovereign—the sovereign was not judged by history.

Once the state enters the discourse of sovereignty, however, it legitimates itself by narrating past struggles and repressions, the war that underlies the peace. This we have identified in the second chapter as, what Foucault calls the historico-political discourse of the state. With the historico-political discourse set on its course, history now drives everything, above all, the state.

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[20] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 67.

State and The Prose of History

> World history is thus the unfolding of Spirit in time, as nature is the unfolding of the Idea in space.[21]
>
>> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on History of Philosophy*

> In our language the term *History* unites the objective with the subjective side, and denotes quite as much the *historia rerum gestarum*, as the *res gestae* themselves; on the other hand it comprehends not less what has *happened*, than the *narration* of what has happened. This union of the two meanings we must regard as of a higher order than mere outward accident; we *must suppose historical narrations to have appeared contemporaneously with historical deeds and events.* It is an internal vital principle common to both that produces them synchronously. Family memorials, patriarchal traditions, have an interest confined to the family and the clan. The uniform course of events which such a condition implies, is no subject of serious remembrance...*But it is the State which first presents subject-matter that is not only* adapted *to the prose of History, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being.*[22]
>
>> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on History of Philosophy*

To begin to speak of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, especially in relation to State and History is to set up a trap for ourselves—for almost every statement made by Hegel can generate several interpretations—and most often violently conflicting ones.[23] A possible way out of this trap is to present a minimal number of undisputed ideas of Hegel, and largely in his own words. Writing in the early nineteenth century, at the heel of the French revolution, Hegel is most well known for his pronouncement in 1806 that History had come to an end. That is to say that the logic of Spirit had

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[21] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Halden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), 12. In the same book, Hegel also writes, "The History of the World begins with its general aim—the realization of the Idea of Spirit." Hegel, *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, 67.

[22] Hegel, *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, 45.

[23] It was perhaps Derrida who said that we will never have finished reading and rereading Hegel.

culminated in the setting up of the bourgeois State.[24] The State was for Hegel the

"actuality of the ethical Idea,"[25] and "the mind objectified,"[26] that is to say, a *telos* of

human progression from a subjectivistic consciousness to an objective rational state.

This development he traces through three phases: family, society and the state. It is

only when man's desires are integrated into a unified (and rational) logic of the State,

can it be said that he has Freedom. Since Hegel claims that the development of

History is intrinsically linked to the development of the State, he dismisses early

historical narrations as mere accounts of contemporaneous events. In speaking of the

history of the ancients he remarks that the narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides are

nothing more than "hazy forms of historical apprehension."[27] Their record of history

is limited by the notion of time in which they existed—these historians cannot

imagine time outside of their own life, as it were. And so the events which they speak

about in history are largely those which they have either witnessed or known by

hearsay. Further Hegel identifies a second stage of history, which he calls 'reflective'

history. Here the spirit of history transcends the present. However, this too is not the

complete realization of the Spirit— the individual will has not yet coincided with a

unified will, or the State. History (or World History) only begins with the State.

History and the State are created together. In the creation of the State from the Spirit

of the World Individual, the individual has attained a state of objectivity. "It is only as

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[24] While Hegel felt, on seeing Napoleon on the streets of Jena, that it was like seeing World Spirit on horseback, he later revised this view to assert that the World Spirit was embodied not in Napoleon but in the Prussian state.

[25] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/prstate.htm.

[26] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right.*

[27] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 20.

one of [the State's] members that the individual has objectivity, genuine individuality, and an ethical life. Unification pure and simple is the content and aim of the individual, and the individual's destiny is the living of a universal life."[28] The recognition and the fulfillment of this 'inner universality' of each individual results in the coming into being of the State, and thus also of History. The individual who is part of the State/History recognizes his Duty in World History. Indeed the State and History are only possible because of this recognition. This awareness of his role in, and in the making of, History makes the individual 'reorganize' himself; and he finally arrives at the end of the Historical process.

The 'prose of History' is thus distinguished from myths and legends, where individuals were not even able to place themselves in real time.[29] Moreover the prose of History is also distinguished from what Foucault identifies as the legitimating function of history, for here too the individual in history is only partially free, as he is as yet unaware of the potential objectivity of his mind. As yet he thinks of only some men as free and others as slaves. Thus this legitimating function cannot be the appropriate subject of the prose of History. It is only when men recognize themselves that they are all part of the Spirit of the Idea of the World that they will begin History—and create the State. There is already in nature an "unconscious instinct; and the whole process of History (as already observed), is directed to rendering this unconscious impulse a conscious one."[30] Men will thus begin, consciously and yet not

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[28] Hegel, *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, 99.

[29] And so Hegel said that the Orientals did not have a History. The matter was not merely one of locating true and verifiable records but more a matter of possessing a historical consciousness. It is because the Indians could not conceive of themselves as a 'humanity' and because they did not show any inclination to move towards an objectified existence that Hegel says they have no History.

[30] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

subjectively, to perform historical deeds that will take humanity to its due

development. History thus is the history of the creation of the State, of the beginning

of the history of World Individuals.[31]

But Where is History…

> Everyone knows…that Karl Marx thought Asiatic and African
> societies to be ahistorical. Few know that he considered Latin Europe,
> and under its influence the whole of South America, to be ahistorical,
> too…[he] considered all Slavic cultures to be ahistorical and the
> Scandinavians to be no better…. After banishing so many races and
> cultures from the realm of history, the great revolutionary was left with
> only a few who lived in history—Germany, where he was born,
> Britain, where he spent much of his later life, and the Low Countries
> through which, one presumes, he travelled from Germany to
> England.[32]
>
> Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles"

Modern history marks itself as a discipline, as a discursive field in opposition to

certain other discursive domains. Thus even when it confesses that the lines dividing

one from the other are subtle, or even fuzzy, it still distinguishes itself from fiction,

myth, folklore, legends, epics and even memory.[33] Claude Calame traces changes in

meaning that the term 'myth' has undergone to finally arrive, in the present moment,

in opposition to history. The early representations of narratives as myths defined them

as such to refer to the story of the gods of the heathens as opposed to the true

revelations of the Bible, while post-Enlightenment Europe classified myths as

belonging to cultures that were exotic (and devoid of true histories). To present this

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[31] This has often been (mis)understood as history being statist in the sense that the state (rather the government) determines what kinds of histories should be produced. I doubt Hegel, in speaking of the prose of History, had in mind the prosaic fact that those in power determine history.

[32] Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," *History and Theory* 34, no. 2 (May 1995): 46.

[33] See for example Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989).

wide gulf between myths, legends, folktales on the one hand and history on the other,

Calame quotes the Grimm brothers' definition of myths, legends and folktales:

> Myths: the erroneous explanations of fundamental phenomena relating
> to man or to nature; they thus represent a first philosophy, a first
> science, but one marked by ignorance and error.
>
> Legends: traditions, oral or written, narrating the fortunes of people
> who actually existed or of natural events having occurred in real
> places; they are situated between truth and falsehood.
>
> Folktales: anonymous and purely fictitious stories that, although
> pretending to narrate actual events, serve only a diversionary
> function.[34]

While the above obviously cannot be taken as serious definitions of the terms, they do

capture a popular perception of them. In defining myths and legends with terms like

'erroneous explanation,' 'between truth and falsehood' and 'pretend to narrate actual

events,' the definitions are obviously measured against history. However this is not

the status of myths in the Greek and Roman period. The Greek and Roman historians

separated myths from factual history by delegating the two to different ages or

periods. Herodotus classifies events in his *Histories* as falling either in the 'time of the

gods' or in the 'time of men.' The time of the gods would be read by modern

historians as myths whereas the time of men would come closer to history, and settle

into being classified as legend.[35] As Calame notes, "the occupation of the first

historiographers is truly to reach back to beginnings in order to combine both

'legendary' past events and more recent events into the continuity of a homogenous

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[34] Claude Calame, *Myth and History in Ancient Greece: The Symbolic Creation of a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), N-18, 23.

[35] For a further discussion on the time of gods and the time of men, see Jean Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

chronology."[36] That is to say that the Greek and Roman historians found no difficulty

in placing myths and actual events in a single chronology.[37] Where did myths end and

where did history begin? Was there no real history in the ancient Greco-Roman

world?

Not even in the Orient…

A similar question began to be raised about the Orient in the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries. Though an abundance of myths, folksongs, chronicles, narratives

and epics was found, the question asked was still: where is the real history? The

colonial view of India was that it had no record of its own past, except a plethora of

fiction. A generous reading of these sources of history would allow us to say, as

Romila Thapar does, that:

> The ancient Indians did keep records of those aspects which they felt
> were significant and worth preserving. It is true that most of these
> records do not deal with political events and activities. They are more
> in the nature of genealogies, legends and monastic chronicles—all
> legitimate constituents of a historical tradition but not, unfortunately,
> very useful as a description of contemporary happenings.[38]

Another response to this kind of material could be represented by R. C. Majumdar's

assertion that "[p]rior to the 13th century AD, we possess no historical text of any

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[36] Calame, *Myth and History in Ancient Greece: The Symbolic Creation of a Colony*, 19.

[37] Again, to draw on Calame's own study, "the judgment by the Athenians in the dispute between Ares and Poseidon, Deucalion and the flood, the foundation of Thebes by Cadmus, the ordeals of the Danaids, the rule of Minos, the arrival of Demeter at Athens, the rape of Kore and the foundation of the Mysteries of Eleusis, the Trojan War, the birth of Homer, the journey of Sappho to Sicily, the capture of Sardis by Cyrus, the murder of Hipparchus by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the battle of Marathon, the first victory of Aeschylus, the sea battle at Salamis, the death of Sophocles, that of Philip II of Macedon, and the rise to power of Alexander the Great were all placed in a single inscription known as the Marmor Parium, speaking of chronological events starting from 264/263 BC." Calame, *Myth and History in Ancient Greece: The Symbolic Creation of a Colony*, 15.

[38] Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1979), 13.

kind, much less detailed narrative as we possess in the case of Greece, Rome or China."[39] But what were these 'genealogies, legends and monastic chronicles' doing if not describing contemporary (or past) happenings? Neither the colonialists nor their learned Orientalist brethren (including historians and Indologists) seemed to be unaware of the variety of sources that Romila Thapar asserts are available for a reconstruction of the Indian past.[40] And yet there is a charge, a serious charge, that India (or the whole of the Orient, though China was often redeemed from this inculpation) did not have a history.[41] Why then did the colonial/Orientalist scholars persist in their charge that India lacks history or historical consciousness when they acknowledged the mythic, genealogical and chronological material as a possible source of the understanding of the past? Why were they unable to recognize the myths, genealogies and narratives as histories? A further question would thus be: what was the Western understanding of history that did not consider certain kinds of material—the documents and chronicles of ancient India—as material appropriate to history? One kind of answer is given by Hegel. History is the culmination of the World Spirit; it begins, exists and ends with the State.[42] Men make History occur when they are unified in an objectified mind, the State. One of the conditions for

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[39] R. C. Majumdar, *Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 1952), 23.

[40] In fact Thapar herself mentions that William Jones, working at Calcutta, was aware of texts that contained myths and legends of the Hindus and suspected that this was the core of Indian history. Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 156.

[41] Often this charge has been dismissed as part of the Orientalist tripe generated by the Indologists and historians. Worse, this charge has been brushed aside as a colonizing tactic. Both these approaches to the perceived lack of history are, if not incorrect, at least incomplete. While on the one hand Orientalist knowledge is deemed as a justification for the Empire, on the other hand, Orientalism itself is said to be vindicated by the Empire. The logic of these arguments is cyclical and thus not very useful in understanding why such a charge was made against India.

[42] This is not to say that humanity will end with the State. It is merely that with the coming into being of the State, there will no more be events appropriate for the prose of history, for all the narratable events will have already occurred.

occurrences in the world to be understood as Historical events is complete Freedom of

all men, such as can only exist in a State. Only when men are able to realize

themselves as humanity can they move History towards its *telos*, the State. Thus the

Orientals not only do not have History but also lack a Historical consciousness, as

demonstrated by the fact that they preserve hierarchies. Hegel says:

> [I]n that country the impulse of organization… was immediately
> petrified in the merely natural classification according to *castes;* so that
> although the laws concern themselves with civil rights, they make even
> these dependent on natural distinctions; and are especially occupied
> with determining the relations… Consequently, the element of
> morality is banished from the pomp of Indian life and from its political
> institutions. Where that iron bondage of distinctions derived from
> nature prevails, the connection of society is nothing but wild
> arbitrariness—transient activity—or rather the play of violent emotion
> without any goal of advancement or development. [43]

The inaccuracy in recording the events of the past as well as their fantastic content

was another reason why the narratives from ancient India were not acceptable as

history.[44] It was difficult to tread the murky areas of Indian history where the same

sources were being labeled religion, myth, mythology, epic, and finally history.[45] Is

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[43] Hegel, *Lectures on Philosophy of World History*, 245.

[44] Hegel writes, "If we had formerly the satisfaction of believing in the antiquity of the Indian wisdom and of holding it in respect, we now have ascertained through being acquainted with the great astronomical works of the Indians, the inaccuracy of all figures quoted. Nothing can be more confused, nothing more imperfect than the chronology of the Indians; no people which has attained to culture in astronomy, mathematics is *as incapable for history*; in it they have neither stability nor coherence. It was believed that such was to be had in the time of Wikramaditya, who was supposed to have lived about 50 B.C., and under whose reign the poet Kalidasa, author of Sakontala, lived. But further research discovered half a dozen Wikramadityas and careful investigation has placed this epoch in our eleventh century. The Indians have lines of kings and an enormous quantity of names, but everything is vague (emphasis added)." Hegel, *Lectures on History of Philosophy*.

[45]See as examples of such a confusion these studies of the *Mahābhārata*: Max Muller, *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (London: Williams & Norgak, 1860), J. Talboys Wheeler, *The History of India: The Vedic Period and the Mahabharata*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: N. Trjibner & Co., 1867),E.J. Rapson, ed., *The Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), R. C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), Buddha Prakash, *Political and Social Movements in Ancient Punjab* (New Delhi: 1964). Buddha Prakash's study in fact is an explicit attempt at historicizing and locating the events of the

the *Mahābhārata* a record, no matter how fantastic, of the events of the past? Or is it a moral tale? Or is it an epic? The *Mahābhārata* has been read as all of the above and in one case even as a drama.[46] How can we read this text as history, or anything else, unless we establish its relation to its larger cultural context?[47] The text will undoubtedly always appear either as falling short of history/ philosophy/ literature, or appearing to have an excess that we cannot grasp. The full impact of this confusion can only be recognized if one were to, as an exercise, transfer questions appropriate to one genre (say fables) to another genre (say history).[48] Why does the history of the World War depict events that demonstrate that bad may win over the good, or worse, that there is violence and evil in the world?

In the twentieth century, the nationalists seem to have inherited the question of history from the Orientalists and the colonialists. Having set out to fill the lacuna of history that the Orientalists and colonialists perceived, the nationalist historians appear to have succeeded, as the work of contemporary Indian historians suggests, not only in writing a history of India,[49] but also in implanting some sort of 'historical

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Mahābhārata. It is exemplary of the confusion that historians were faced with in writing the history of ancient India.

[46] Promatha Nath Mullick, *The Mahabharata- as a History and Drama* (Calcutta: Thacker Spink &Co., 1939).

[47] This difficulty can be understood as an instance of the 'hermeneutic circle.' See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005).

[48] While it is indeed possible to write a history from the study of poetry or coins, and write a moral parable from the lessons of history, it can only be done with the complete awareness of the sources. That is to say, in creating history from the study of poetry, there should be no doubt that the text that is being taken as the source is within the genre of poetry.

[49] This success is evidenced by the number of histories that were written during the late colonial and early post-Independence period. See for example: V. N. Hari Rao, *A History of India Upto A. D. 1526* (London: Rochouse, 1968), V. N. Hari Rao, *A History of Modern India from A. D. 1526 to the Present* (London: Rochouse, 1968), Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Narendra Krishna Sinha and Anil Chandra Banerjee, *A History of India* (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee & Bros., 1944), Ishwari Prasad, *A New History of India* (Bombay: Indian Press Ltd., 1940), Surendra Nath Sen and

consciousness' in Indian thought. While the nationalists wrote in an attempt to answer

the Orientalist and colonialist charge, the contemporary historian has inherited and

incorporated modern history, unmindful of its past, as a way of relating to his/her

past. Is then the difference between the colonial or Orientalist assertion of a lack of

history in India and the modern historians' observation of the absence of history in

ancient India merely one of disposition? The colonizers pejoratively asserted that

India lacked history and attributed this lack of history writing either to India's

primitive and underdeveloped status or to her mysterious notion of time, or perhaps to

her inability to conceive herself in historical time and space. The modern historians

deal more sensitively with this lack of history and consolingly claim that history can

be extracted and produced from the abundance of mythic and narrative sources

present in ancient India. For the colonial and Orientalists the claim that there is a lack

of history is a value judgment and not merely a descriptive observation. An absence

of history is almost an expression of barbarity. So much so that one of the elements in

the civilizing process of the Orient was the giving of a history.[50] So when the modern

historians begin to write a history of India, or give to India a history, are they

responding to the charge made by the colonialist and Orientalists? To formulate the

question more sharply: do the modern historians accept the claim that Indian society,

for want of a history (and thus politics, but we will come back to this), is barbaric and

see the project of history writing as a step towards civility? And so by writing a

chronological history and by placing events narrated in legends, myths and chronicles

Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *The Groundwork of Indian History* (Calcutta: Chuckervertty, Chatterjee, 1934).

[50] Efforts in this direction include: Sir William Wilson Hunter, *History of India* (New York: The Grolier Society, 1907), Monstuart Elphinstone and Edward Cowell, *The History of India: The Hindu and Mahometan Periods* (London: J. Murray, 1889), Monstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: 1842), James Mill, *The History of British India* (London: 1820), Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindustan* (London: 1768-71).

verifiably in time and space would Indian society now acquire an adequate historical

consciousness to move it towards the *telos* of humanity?[51]

Moreover, since it must be admitted that Indian history written by postcolonial

historians differs greatly from the kind of material that formed history in ancient

India, what has changed in the consciousness of the postcolonial subjects that their

way of relating to the past differs so starkly from that their ancient counterparts?[52]

One of the corrective measures that modern history takes in relation to its sources is to

historicize them, countercheck different kinds of material and verify the story that one

source is telling by comparing it with several others. For example, though it was said

that Kalidasa's *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* was written around the fourth century A.D.,[53]

some historians prefer to date it to an earlier period. However, if the narrative of the

Ādī Parvan from the epic *Mahābhārata* is dated between 400 B.C. and 400 A.D., and

if we are able to establish that the play was based on this narrative, it would not be

unreasonable to date Kalidasa's play to the fourth century A.D. Moreover, since it is

said that Kalidasa's *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* is illustrative of the Golden Ages of the

Gupta kings (320-500 A.D.),[54] we have further evidence of it being written around the

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[51] Indeed there is also a corresponding move to give India a state, a nation and a citizenry, not to mention, eradicate hierarchies like the caste system and secularize the religious and superstitious tendencies in political and social life. We have seen in the previous three chapters how even though there is a desire to achieve these things, it is not clear what it actually involves. The attempt to write history I suspect follows a similar pattern.

[52] Though for the purpose of this analysis we have relegated the mythic way of relating to the past to the ancient period, this should not be seen as implying that this way of looking at the past has been supplanted by the modern notion of history; for the mythic way continues to the present day. Though historians like Romila Thapar and Ranajit Guha evoke the notion of *itihāsa* in relation to Indian historical tradition, it is not clear whether they see the *itihāsa purānic* mode of historical writing as an option still available to modern Indians. See Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and Its Implications* (Calcutta: 1988). And also Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[53] Romila Thapar, *Śakuntalā: Texts, Readings, Histories* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999), 7.

[54] John Keay, *India: A History* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 20.

fourth century A.D. and not earlier. What we have been able to establish here, other

than a rudimentary periodizing of Kalidasa's *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam,* is that from

historical sources we are able to construct a chronological modern history. But why

was this not done earlier? Was not Indian history interested in chronologizing the

past?

The Pastness of History

> The discussion over the nature of historical representation has an
> importance far exceeding the rather banal problem of telling the truth
> about the past as best as one can on the basis of the study of the
> documents. No one denies that historians—of whatever stripe—*want
> to tell the truth about the event and persons of the past;* the question is,
> can they ever do so, given the constraints on both unambiguous
> referentiality, on the one side, and the fictionalized effects of
> narrativization on the other (emphasis added)? [55]
>
>> Hayden White, "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing"
>
> The 'acceleration of history,' then, confronts us with the brutal
> realization of the difference between real memory—social and
> unviolated…—and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful
> modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past. On the one
> hand, we find an integrated, dictatorial memory—unself-conscious,
> commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a *memory
> without a past* that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of
> its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth—
> and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted
> and sorted historical traces (emphasis added). [56]
>
>> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire"

Once we have reviewed the variety of narratives that form history, we cannot assume,

as Hayden White does, that the fundamental *aim* of all history is to tell the truth about

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[55] Hayden White, "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing," in *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/ Literature Debate*, ed. Kuisma Korhonen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 30.

[56] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989): 8.

the past.[57] Our contention here is, however, not with truth-telling (which we will problematize shortly) but with narrating the *past*. White writes that historical discourse is about events, persons, structures, and processes that are markedly identified as past.[58] This statement almost seems like a tautology. Though everything about the past is not history, history is definitely about the past; pastness is a minimal requirement. Let us review this claim with reference to histories in the ancient Greco-Roman period as well as historical material from ancient India, for they are more appropriately located in the realm of 'real memory' than in the 'sifted and sorted' history that Pierre Nora identifies as 'our memory.'[59] One of the criticisms leveled against Greco-Roman histories by Hegel was that they were unable to transcend the present moment. That is to say, the Greek and Roman historians only narrativize the events that have occurred in the present or have a direct relationship to the present. They are unable to plot in time events of a distant past or another people and their past. Furthermore, the periodization of events and persons does not necessarily follow the chronology that modern history takes for granted. Events are often classified as belonging either to the period of the gods or the period of men.[60] Does this refer to a

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[57] Hayden White argues that though historians aim to tell the truth about the past, history can only narrativize the past. This narrative follows the tropes of metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy and irony, giving us the emplotment of history as tragedy, romance, comedy and satire. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). The moralizing narrative of history, White writes, is inevitable even if the desire is to tell the truth about the past.

[58] He also says "First, historical discourse is possible only on the presumption of the existence of the past as something about which it is possible to speak meaningfully. Second, historical discourse, unlike scientific discourse, does not presuppose that our knowledge of history derives from a distinctive method of studying the kinds of things that happen to be past rather than present… To be sure, it is only insofar as they *are* past or are effectively so treated that such entities can be studied historically; but it is not their pastness that makes them historical." Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 16.

[59] Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire," 8.

[60] Pierre Vidal-Nacquet, "Temps Des Dieux Et Les Temps Des Hommes," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 157 (1960).

separate temporal sphere? Or a distinct spatial arena? Pierre Vidal-Nacquet is of the

opinion that it is a temporal separation that is alluded to when Herodotus speaks of the

time of the gods and the time of men. This cleanly solves the problem of chronology

and Vidal-Nacquet then proceeds to understand Greek histories as simply operating

within a different classification of time. Referring to Vidal-Nacquet, Bernard

Williams writes "but of course the world in which the gods acted and revealed

themselves was also a world of human beings, and this is shown by the presence of

figures with one divine and one human parent: even in those old days, copulation

required some degree of simultaneity."[61]

Ancient Indian material has provided fodder for even greater amusement or

ridicule.[62] It is almost an academic truism that the notion of time in ancient India was

cyclical. Events are classified (largely) into four *yugas*.[63] But most often present day

events are said to belong to the *kali yuga*. Events occurring almost simultaneously are

placed within the *sata yuga* or the *treta yuga*. How is this possible? It cannot be that

these *yugas* actually refer to some kind of temporal chronology; cyclical or otherwise.

The classification into *yugas*, however, is more expressive of an attitude to certain

events, persons or processes rather than a scientific dating or a historicizing of them.

Events said to fall in the *sata yuga* are necessarily understood as positive occurrences

and recorded as ideals for imitation, while events that fall within the *kali yuga* are a

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[61] Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 159.

[62] Sir Babbington Macaulay sneers at Indian history as "abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long—and geography made up of seas of treacle and butter." Cited in S.N. Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness…: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 483.

[63] The number of years that each *yuga* comprises is a contentious matter and the specific number ranges from eighteen thousand years to more than hundred thousand years.

mark of degeneration in the world, recorded to note a trend of devolution or as examples of bad and degenerate actions. Also the existence of *kali yuga* marks either the expectation of the arrival of the *sata yuga* again or a backward movement into the *dvāpara yuga*. Romila Thapar explains how "the major significance of these sources [the epics] lies more in their indication of the nature of the trend of change which they delineate rather than in the precise dating of the change."[64] It should also be noted that the Hindu calendar does not operate as per these *yugas*, but follows a fairly linear progression. And yet the dating of the epics and chronicles is said to be fuzzy, either based on the *yugas* or inaccurate in general.

Given that time is not a significant element in ancient narratives can we assume that the histories of the ancient Greco-Roman period and the ancient Indian period are narratives about the past? Let us hypothetically assume that these histories are not about the past at all.

The Truth about What?

If we were to consider the above proposition that the history of the ancients (Greco-Roman and Indian) is not really about the past, then the immediate question would be: then what is it about? What are these histories claiming to speak of? What are all these chronicles and genealogies recording? How can we say that pastness is not crucial for these histories? A brief re-examination of the extracts from Herodotus and Livy quoted in an earlier section may be able to clarify these issues. Herodotus expresses his intent to record the feud between the Greeks and the Barbarians. The purpose of his history is to record the acts of glory that were performed during the

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[64] Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1984), 17.

feud. These actions are valuable, not as events in history but as events in themselves, merely recorded by history. These events could just as well have been recorded by poets, which indeed they have been. The truth of these events does not lie in whether they occurred or not, or if they occurred as they are recorded. The truth of history does not depend on its accuracy to depict the actual events of the past. (It does not, in any case, depend on events of the past at all). The value of history is in its ability to narrativize events that are conducive to action. Thus we are in a position to recognize the force of Livy's prefatory statements. It is desirable, according to Livy, that a study of a variety of actions be undertaken. What better way to do this than to study the rise and fall of the great Roman Empire? There one will find every kind of conduct—the task of the historian is to place these actions on a 'conspicuous monument,' that is, record them in history. And so it is the task of history, and not its failing, to embellish actions—through exaggeration, dramatization or 'moralization'—such that they *become* conspicuous, clear and perfectly unambiguous.

This function of history was explored in a systematic science of politics for the first time by Niccolo Machiavelli. Machiavelli remains the most influential commentator of Livy's *Discourses* and forebear of the theorists of the Enlightenment. Though not a part of the ancient tradition, he does not find the history of the ancients strange and compromised. He sees something valuable, as he claims his ancestors did, in the writing of this kind of history. How can we understand Machiavelli's exaltation of the history of the ancients?

Baptizing the Ancients: Machiavelli and the History of Rome

> It is a DIALECTICAL PARADOX that while the Christian doctrine of
> salvation ultimately made the historical vision possible, for centuries it

operated to deny the possibility. The Greek and Roman intellects saw
little reason for anything new to happen in the human future, and
doctrines of cyclical recurrence or the supremacy of chance…arose
and interpenetrated… to express this lack of expectation, which
sometimes occasioned world-weariness and *angst*. Within these empty-
seeming schemes, however, there was room for much acute study of
political and military happenings, and the actions of men did not lose
interest—rather perhaps the reverse—when it was thought that they
would some day, in the ordinary or the cosmological course of things,
be repeated.[65]

J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*

Setting the stage for Machiavelli's writings, J. G. A. Pocock introduces us to the

difference in the way the ancients perceived the progression of time and the way in

which the Christians understand it. This difference is a very large one, one which

affects not just the understanding of the past and/or the writing of history but one that

has implications for the very creation and sustenance of a political community.

Machiavelli was able to glimpse the consequences of the changes that took place in

ways of narrating history, and though his interest was largely in the direct

implications of these changes for political administration, he also offers some

insightful observations about the ancients and the Christians.

As part of the Italian Renaissance, Machiavelli's love for antiquity is not unusual.

Though he was often criticized by his own contemporaries for trying to live out,

through his political tracts, his dream of recreating the Roman Empire, his desire to

imitate the glory of Rome has been eloquently elaborated in his own treatise and in

his writings on Livy. More than his love for antiquity, Machiavelli is known for his

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[65] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1975), 31.

shrewd administrative abilities and tactical planning of political governance.[66] It

would not be unfounded to read, provisionally at least, his love of antiquity more as a

tactic of governance than a love for knowledge of antiquity. In his *Discourses on

Livy*,[67] Machiavelli explains unequivocally why: i) the Romans are worth imitating,

and ii) his own contemporaries could not be like the Romans.

The Romans, for Machiavelli, signified a patriotism and loyalty to community

that his own Renaissance individualist Christian fellowmen could not match up to.

This patriotism and loyalty made possible the grand Roman Empire. What was it that

made the Romans more patriotic and democratic, or 'lovers of liberty,' as Machiavelli

calls them?

> If one asks oneself how it comes about that the peoples of old were
> more fond of liberty than they are today, I think that the answer is that
> it is due to the same cause that makes men less bold than they use to
> be; and this is due to the difference of our education and that of the
> bygone times, which is based on the difference between our religion
> and the religion of those days. For our religion, *having taught us the
> truth and the true way of life, leads us to ascribe less esteem to worldly
> glory* (emphasis added).[68]

The religions of the 'Gentiles' (pagans), according to Machiavelli, instilled in them

the importance of the 'honors of the world,'[69] whereas Christianity undermines this

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[66] Machiavelli's judgment, according to Ernst Cassirer, "was that of a scientist and a technician of political life." Unlike the *techne* of Plato, Machiavelli's *arte dello Stato* is neither concerned with the ethics of politics, nor a theory of the Legal State. It applied equally to illegal and legal states, to usurpers and tyrants, as much as to just rulers. Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 194.

[67] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tracov (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

[68] Machiavelli quoted in Smith, *Politics and Remembrance: Republican Themes in Machiavelli, Burke, and Tocqueville*, 43.

[69] 'Religion' provided significant content to the histories of the ancient; Machiavelli without articulating it has been able to identify religion and history as tightly enmeshed entities.

glory and teaches truth. This Machiavelli saw as a disadvantage. Truth and its pursuit

strips men of any inclination towards valorous action. It distracts them from the day-

to-day business of social life, sending them instead in search of salvation.[70]

Machiavelli claims that with the arrival of the new religion, Christianity, it is no

longer possible to expect bold actions from the members of the community to protect

their traditional practices. Since loyalty to and reverence for one's ancestors and the

performance of rituals and customs no longer define membership to the community,

as God's people, men no longer feel as motivated to perform bold actions for their

community. The religions of the ancients, while not professing truth, were

undoubtedly interested in the *techniques* of living the good life, deliberations on the

gods and the practices of the ancestors. The religions of the ancients were closely

related to their imagined origin as a people, as was their history. The existence of a

multiplicity of religions was thus only to be expected since religion was not making

truth claims about their practices. As Vernant has pointed out:

> [T]he role of this religion is to define, to mark more clearly the social
> particularities of a city in relation to other cities, and Greekness in
> relation to what is not Greek. Religion does not have a universal
> character, it does not tend to go beyond the civilization in which it is
> rooted, it does not seek (through missions or crusades) to spread this
> religious universe beyond the society in which it is expressed. Greek
> religion is only for the Greeks.[71]

Machiavelli had, long before Vernant, identified the pagan religions as what marked

the salience of one community from another. While the religions of antiquity made

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[70] Machiavelli's disinclination towards the Christian path of truth is demonstrated by his famous assertion: "I would receive honor before Grace. I would be a hero before a saint. I would be remembered before I would be saved."

[71] Jean Pierre Vernant, "Forms of Belief and Rationality in Greece," in *Agon, Logos, Polis: The Greek Achievement and Its Aftermath*, ed. Johann P. Arnason and Peter Murphy (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001), 122.

possible strong community bonds by glorifying the community through histories, the

new religion that was more concerned with the pursuit of truth, did not employ history

to maintain and sustain the community. Machiavelli begins a study of Livy's

Histories in an attempt, not to imitate the Romans, but to imitate the technique of the

Romans. His imitation of the ancients did not assume any similarity to the ancients'

imitation of their ancestors, though Machiavelli did think of the Romans as his

ancestors. Machiavelli could look to the ancients with awe and respect but he was

already afflicted by the new religion and a historical consciousness that he could only

reflect about but not escape. Or, as Smith aptly puts it, Machiavelli believed that his

contemporaries must imitate "the ancients but only after the ancients are painted in

Machiavellian hues."[72] Machiavelli understood the Romans' imitation of their

ancestors as blind ritualism. He felt that the Roman would defend the practices of his

forefathers with grave and undying commitment and without much questioning. He

felt that they lacked the spirit of skepticism. The political community of the ancients

was thus merely an obedient and acquiescent society. While many students of

antiquity would agree with Machiavelli's characterization, as Balagangadhara explains,

the ancients were not mere conformists. As he points out:

> Greco-Roman intellectuals are not dogmatic traditionalists defending
> this or that particular practice by appealing to the fact that their fathers
> and forefathers always performed them too. After all…the Ancients
> pioneered the spirit of scientific enquiry—the spirit of ruthlessly
> questioning each belief. And yet there was a sphere, the *religio*, which
> was not affected by critical questioning, practiced because it was
> *traditio*.[73]

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[72] Smith, *Politics and Remembrance: Republican Themes in Machiavelli, Burke, and Tocqueville*, 96.

[73] Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness…: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*, 44.

In his enthusiasm to imitate the ancients, Machiavelli did not realize that if the old

religion has been replaced, so has the old history. Men who go in pursuit of salvation

will also go in pursuit of truth and of origins. But what was this new historical

consciousness that did not recreate the great Roman Empire but instead created

modern states and nations? We could say that Machiavelli's reflections actually

looked ahead in time, towards John Locke, individualism, social contract and the

modern state rather than backward at the Roman Empire, Cicero, Aurelius or the 'care

of the self' tradition.[74] Machiavelli represents the earliest awareness, as it were, of the

new historical consciousness. In him we see the beginning of the new historical

discourse, which will soon be canonized as more than just a way of understanding the

past. Karl Marx's study of history is an appropriate text for an illustration of the

nature of this historical discourse.

Marx and the *Telos* of Historical Consciousness

> Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and
> personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time
> as tragedy, the second time as farce.[75]
>
> > Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napolean*

> Many modern Marxists, embarrassed by the similarities between this
> notion of history and its religious, specifically Judaeo-Christian
> prototypes, have tended to play down this 'prophetic' aspect and given
> themselves to the study of discrete, 'concrete' historical and social
> phenomena. This allows them to appear more 'scientific,' after the
> manner of their counterparts in the bourgeois social sciences, but it
> also deprives their discourse of that moral coloration which Marx
> derived from his Hegelian, utopian, and religious forebears....Take the
> vision out of Marxism and all you have left is a timid historian of the

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[74] See Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11. Here Skinner mentions that the work of 'politic' humanists such as Richard Beacon and Francis Bacon, as well as later contractualists, drew on the work of Machiavelli.

[75] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: 1851-1853* 50 vols., vol. 11 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), 87.

> kind favored by liberals and the kind of accommodationist politics
> which utilitarians identify as the essence of politics itself.[76]
>
> Hayden White, "Getting out of History"

Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napolean* presents the sharpest critique of the new historical discourse, and yet, ironically, *The Communist Manifesto* becomes an example of the same discourse. Marx begins the account of the events of 9th November 1779 when Louis Napoleon Bonaparte the first takes over France in a *coup d'etat* by recalling Hegel's remark that history repeats itself. For Marx, as for Hegel, history moved in a teleological progression, with each successive stage of production replacing the previous. While Hegel's teleology progressed from a state of tyranny (or hierarchy) to freedom, Marx's teleology proceeds from a basic 'realm of necessity' to the 'realm of freedom.' The Spirit that was to move world history, (and which finally rested in the body of Napoleon or in the Prussian State), is "afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter."[77] For Marx the historical consciousness is dependant on material conditions and not the other way round. Despite his differences with Hegel, Marx's understanding of history, Hayden White argues, inherits a prophetic, visionary element from "his Hegelian, utopian, and religious forebears."

In elaborating his materialist conception of history, Marx critiques existing theories of politics that posit unempirical presuppositions.[78] He writes:

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[76] Hayden White, "Getting out of History," *Diacritics* 12, no. 3 (Autumn, 1982): 2.

[77] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1845-47, Vol. 5: Theses on Feuerbach, the German Ideology and Related Manuscripts* (International Publishers, 1976), 113.

[78] It is perhaps the social contract theories that he has in mind, which presuppose a 'state of nature' or a constant state of war, though he claims to be talking here only of German idealism. In "The

The fact is, therefore, that definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.

What [men] are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.[79]

The teleology that Hegel had proposed is not rejected by Marx, even though it is radically reorganized. He adds that the repetition of history can only be farcical, thus erasing from historical progression any deviation from the straightforward march to the end of the final stage of the social relations of production. Turning to dead men and old ideas slowed the natural progression of the revolutions from one epoch to another. Napoleon and his men, according to Marx, were doing exactly that; they were playing out the bourgeois revolution in "Roman costumes and with Roman

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Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law," which was published in the *Rheinische Zeitung* no.221 (Aug, 1842), Marx writes "According to a fiction current in the eighteenth century, the natural state was considered the true state of human nature." See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1838-42, Vol. 2: The Early Writings of Engels, Including Poems and Correspondence* (International Publishers, 1975), 203. Marx's critique of non-empirical assumptions is sharpest in the critique of M. Proudhon's *Philosophy of Poverty*. "So many needs to satisfy presupposes so many things to produce—…So many things to produce presupposes at once more than one man's hand helping to produce them. Now the moment you postulate more than one hand helping in production, you at once presuppose a whole production based on the division of labor. Thus need, as M. Proudhon presupposes it, itself presupposes the whole division of labor. In presupposing the division of labor, you get exchange and consequently exchange value. One might as well have presupposed exchange value from the very beginning." Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 32.

[79] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1845-47, Vol. 5: Theses on Feuerbach, the German Ideology and Related Manuscripts*, 13.

phrases."[80] This enactment of history, is however, very different from the imitation of the action of the narrative of history. While Machiavelli could at least glimpse the idea of imitation of the past as a type of instruction, for Marx, history becomes "the tradition of all dead generations [which] weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."[81] Now instead of history, he only has available a historical consciousness that allows the present generations not to commit the mistakes of the past; history has once again become the means of providing a lesson, albeit a very different lesson from the one that was taught to the Greeks and the Romans.

In critiquing the bourgeoisie revolutionaries for invoking the Romans, Marx himself adopts the historico-political discourse that the bourgeois employed to legitimate the revolution. As Friedrich Engels writes:

> This new conception of history, however, was of supreme significance for the socialist outlook. It showed that all previous history moved in class antagonisms and class struggles, that there have always existed ruling and ruled, exploiting and exploited classes, and that the great majority of mankind has always been condemned to arduous labor and little enjoyment.[82]

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[80] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works: 1851-1853*, 2.

[81] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works: 1851-1853*.

[82] Friedrich Engels, "Abstract from Karl Marx," http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/karl-marx.htm. Also in the preface to the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels says "all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social evolution; that this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time forever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression, class struggles—this basic thought belongs solely and exclusively to Marx." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 2002), 4.

Thus, not only do the specific struggles for power adopt the historico-political discourse, but with Marx, history itself becomes a series of class struggles. History, and not just aspects of history, is subsumed under the historico-political discourse.

Retelling the Story of History

> Prominent in the characterization of history as a Western discipline has been the requirement that there be some kind of coherence, whether explanatory or generalizing, among the facts. Without this quality, history by definition is no longer history; it becomes chronicle.[83]
>
> Leonard Krieger, *Time's Reasons*

In the second chapter we mentioned the germination of the historico-political discourse as a legitimating technique of the nobility. History before that was the "history of power that power had made people tell: it was the history of power recounted by power."[84] While coherence was earlier given to history by the sovereign, with the coming into being of the historico-political discourse, it is history that becomes a legitimating principle of power and of the rights to land. This discourse is, however, partisan and parochial. The discourse of nationalism retains a hazy sense of this parochialism.[85] The Hegelian dialectic, as we have seen above, is nothing but a self-dialecticization of the historico-political discourse.

> It would…be a mistake to think that the dialectic can function as the great reconversion of [the historico-political] discourse, or that it can finally convert it into philosophy. The dialectic may at first sight seem to be the discourse of the universal and historical movement of contradiction and war, but…it does not in fact validate this discourse in philosophical terms. On the contrary… it had the effect of taking it

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[83] Leonard Krieger, *Time's Reasons: Philosophies of History Old and New* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1989), 1.

[84] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, 133.

[85] It is when this hazy sense becomes clearer that we critique nationalism as 'jingoism.'

over and displacing it into the old form of philosophico-juridical discourse.[86]

Thus it is not just the categories of the nation and the state that are colonized by the historico-political discourse, but the concept of history itself is a product of the historico-political discourse that culminates in the 'philosophy of world history' or the universal struggles of the victims of history. History that we think of as a universal frame for relating to the past can only be appreciated within the tradition of sovereignty. It can only provide a particular pre-ordained coherence to the lives of men and their past.

It should be no surprise to us now if we find, as Dipesh Chakrabarty does, that "'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe.'"[87]

In last four chapters we have been telling the story of the categories of our political theorization. We have seen that the terminology of our political language is derived from Western political discourse. That is to say whether we are able to provide unique content to these terms or not, it is these and no others that have become the terms with which we understand out political realities. When employed in the Indian context, however, these terms display a peculiar character. There is no concept underlying the various uses of these terms but they retain a strong evaluative

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[86] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, 58.

[87] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks For "Indian" Pasts," *Representations* (Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories), no. 37 (Winter 1992): 1.

force. We then tried to understand what provided intelligibility to these concepts and how they came to become categories of political analysis, or what Quentin Skinner calls 'appraisive words.' For this we undertook to explore the necessary link between these 'keywords' and the 'historical ontology' of the West. The political vocabulary of the West is not only constituted by its own unique experience but in the process of dialecticization, these concepts frame the experience of all other cultures and peoples rendering them as pale variants of Western culture. This process we recognize as 'Orientalism.' Our discussion in the last three chapters has helped us realize that we cannot overcome or dispute Orientalism by merely producing our own nation-state, citizenry or history. One way to counter it is to critique, as we have attempted to do so far, the discourses that produced it. But, before we can begin a positive understanding of ourselves, we will need to address that which has been understood as an obsolescence, or as a resistance to the Western political discourse.

Chapter 5

Sarasvatīcandra: **Between Instruction and Representation?**

The last three chapters sought to diagnose the problems afflicting Indian political discourse. A genealogy of the Western political lexicon was undertaken to identify the conditions under which its terms are made intelligible, or how they became key concepts of Western political thought. These conditions, as we saw, constitute the historical ontology of the West, or the Western experience of itself and its Other. It is time now to return to the concerns outlined in the first chapter and situate the necessary incoherence of a particular way of understanding ourselves that has evolved, willy-nilly, into the now familiar lexicon of Indian politics.

For an inquiry into our self-understanding an insight into the nineteenth century experience of colonization becomes crucial. It is the moment when the interaction between colonial institutions and knowledge and the indigenous culture was at its most vibrant. This moment threw up several ways of self-characterization that we variously describe as reform, revival, modernization and so on. This chapter will try to explain how the colonized intelligentsia began to acquire and deploy a language when the historical/conceptual grid that gave intelligibility to it was not only unavailable but, as the last three chapters have shown, cannot be available. I will turn to one of the earliest, and probably the most influential of, Gujarati novels of the colonial period, *Sarasvatīcandra.* This four-part work by Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, published between 1887 and 1901, is an experiment with the alien literary form of the novel that attempts to acquire and deploy the Western lexicon to understand Indian realities, and thus exemplifies the problem of what I call cultural

translation. The novel has several curious features that I contend allow us to once again ask the question: how do we represent ourselves?

One representation of our culture, as we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, has been offered by Orientalist scholars and colonialist administrators. The Orientalists provided an understanding of Indian culture/civilization and the colonialists further made available ways of functioning with the natives, largely based on the knowledge produced by the Orientalists. A critique of the Orientalist body of knowledge, of the ways in which the West perceived the East, is undertaken by Edward Said's *Orientalism*.[1] This critique alerts us to the limits of the Western understanding of the East. In the last three chapters we have explored the contours of this limitation. Escaping the limits of the Orientalist discourse cannot, however, be an exercise in telling the 'truth about the Orient.' We could thus rephrase the question we asked above as: how does the Orient look at itself in the light of Orientalist discourses and colonial administration? *Sarasvatīcandra* trenchantly depicts two powerful attempts at such a self-understanding of the East, in the form of its two protagonists, Sarasvatichandra and Kumud Sundari.[2] Sarasvatichandra, embodying one attempt at self-representation, anticipates the trajectory, albeit with several divergences, of Indian political theory; whereas Kumud Sundari can be seen as representing another way of making sense of the world. These two characters, signifying distinctive positions vis-à-vis colonial knowledge are, however, not independent of each other but are in a continual dialogue, not only with each other, but also with colonial

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[1] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001).

[2] The novel, indeed, does not characterize its protagonists as two attempts at a self-understanding of Indian culture. But in an attempt to arrive at a representation of Indian society the novel throws up these two protagonists, who present, as it were, two fairly different responses to the colonial system. It is these two responses that I mark as two attempts at self-understanding.

knowledge itself. In previous chapters we tried to understand, through various

conceptual frameworks, one of these ways of self-representation, the way of

Sarasvatichandra. This chapter will recreate some of the early articulations of this

discourse by examining Sarasvatichandra's own journey through various frames of

understanding and his experiments with the translation and representation of his own

culture. But the main focus of this chapter will be the characterization of the second

way of making sense of one's own culture, the way of Kumud Sundari.

Govardhanram Tripathi and the Desire to Modernize

> I wish to produce, or see produced, not any this or that event—but a
> people who shall be higher and stronger than they are, who shall be
> better able to look and manage for themselves than is the present
> helpless generation of my educated and uneducated countrymen. What
> kind of nation should that be and how the spark should be kindled for
> that organic flame: these were, and are the problems before my mind.[3]
>
> Govardhanram Tripathi, *Scrap Book I*

As part of the late nineteenth century cultural milieu of Gujarat, one found oneself in

the middle of a dramatic socio-political situation. The Orientalist representation of

Indian culture was not unknown to the Gujarati people and they were struggling with

the very novelty of beholding a representation of themselves in which they often did

not even recognize themselves. Several aspects of this representation and

understanding of Indian culture were being discussed and debated in various forms[4]

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[3] Kantilal C. Pandya, Ramprasad P. Bakshi, and Sanmukhlal J. Pandya, eds., *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894 Manuscript Volumes I, II, III, IV-Part (1)* (Bombay: N. M. Tripathi Pr Ltd, 1959), 29.

[4] Among other well known modes of debate, one way of mobilizing a collective for social reform was to solicit essays on controversial topics by placing an attractive cash prize for the best essay. The topics for such essays were straightforward and did not leave much room for interpretation or imagination. Typically they were on subjects such as 'The Need for English Education' or 'The Bond of Slavery of the Maharajas.'

by the people of Gujarat.[5] In 1851, one of the earliest prose writers in Gujarati,

Narmadashankar Lalshankar Dave, wrote his essay, *Manialī Malāvthī thatā Lābha*

(The Advantages of Forming Forums),[6] in which he presents a convincing argument

for social reform and the need to form a collective. For this purpose he even started a

society called the *Buddhī-Vardhaka Sabhā* (literally, The Intelligence Enhancement

Society or, roughly, the Enlightenment Society). Issues ranging from the need for

history in India to the advantages of foreign travel were discussed in societies such as

these.[7]

   Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi was an integral part of this ethos. Much has

been written about Govardhanram's own project of modernity, a project that first

finds its voice in reform and later in the character of the protagonist of his ambitious

novel, *Sarasvatīcandra*. Govardhanram's enthusiasm in welcoming a new nation that

will be free from hierarchies and oppressive institutions is, however, more than just a

straightforward articulation of a modernist or reformist agenda.[8] Through his writing,

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[5] While I will often be speaking, in this chapter, about the cultural milieu of Gujarat and the political
and social debates within the Gujarati speaking world, this is just a case study, and in no way an
exclusive argument about Gujarat. It is for the same reason that I have avoided unnecessary and
ostentatious citation of the social or literary history of Gujarat. The study of the case of
Sarasvatīcandra and the debates in Gujarat should hold true, minimally, of any region in modern India.

[6] This essay has been acclaimed as the first prose essay in Gujarati. See Sitanshu Yashaschandra,
"Towards Hind Swaraj: An Interpretation of the Rise of Prose in Nineteenth Century Gujarati
Literature," *Social Scientist* 23, no. 10/12 (Oct-Dec., 1995).

[7] One of the earliest publications of this society is a paper on the advantages of foreign travel which
was presented to the society in 1953 by Karsondas Mulji. The *Buddhī-Vārdhaka Sabhā* also ran three
schools; two for girls and one for boys (which Mulji supervised).

[8] I have conflated the modernist and reformist articulations here though I recognize the differences
between the two. I am in no way using them as synonyms but rather locating both as part of a
movement to reorganize the Indian people and their culture. What form is given to this reorganization
will determine whether it is a revivalist, modernist or reformist project. Govardhanram can be called
modernist because of his continual emphasis on the need for English education and the education of
women. In his *Scrap Book* and in his letters to his uncle Mansukhlal, Govardhanram declares,
unequivocally, his reverence for Western rationality. These have been seen, by several sociologists and
political theorists, as a mark of modernity.

Govardhanram tries to resolve the clash that he perceives between, on the one hand, the existing institutions (the joint family and the caste system) and practices (widow remarriage and child marriage) and, on the other hand, the promised and impending arrival of an independent nation-state that would be based on the ideology of the existing liberal modern state. This liberal state would, in all probability and in accordance with its own ideology, create an environment unfavorable to the survival of these institutions and practices. In examining the joint family as an example of the indigenous institution, Govardhanram goes through a series of monologues, sometimes defending the institution for the support it provides in times of distress and sometimes condemning it as the site of the suppression of individuality.[9] This dilemma that the reformer and author of *Sarasvatīcandra* faces with regard to indigenous institutions is recorded in his *Scrap Book*. Prior to the writing of his epic-like novel, Govardhanram had begun writing his *Scrap Book*, a kind of formal diary. The diary provides enough evidence for us to surmise that he might have intended it for publication at some point. The *Scrap Book* is a series of notes largely concerned with ethics and reflections on how to live. It is difficult to say whether the *Scrap Book* is a personal diary or a guidebook of ethics. For, while there is a record of the day-to-day events of Govardhanram's life, the events recorded are meant to further the deliberative processes Govardhanram is involved in.[10] These reflections are, however, placed firmly within the context of the presence of the British colonial system. There

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[9] For a detailed discussion on Govardhanram's deliberations on the Hindu joint family in the *Scrap Books,* see Sudhir Chandra, *Continuing Dilemma: Understanding Social Consciousness* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2002).

[10] There are several diaries in which the authors reflect upon the events recorded in it. This, however, is more a record of events meant to facilitate reflection. The *Scrap Book* includes, amongst other things, study timetables and quotations that provoked some thought. The quotations themselves may not provide deep insight but if they facilitated a thought process that Govardhanram found useful they are cited in the *Scrap Book*. Thus the reader may often find these quotations banal in themselves. They can only be understood as thought facilitators, or meditative devices.

is an unequivocal recognition of a new order and the existing traditional system is

either likened to it or distinguished from it.

> Joint Family System and Early Marriages must go to the wall, and man
> must be manly and woman must be herself—not the girl-daughter-in-
> law of the Joint Family, mother-in-law at 25, nor the wife at 12, nor the
> powerless and clashing faction of an exclusive unit of a society of
> worms, but a self-subsisting unit of society by herself. Bring that day
> for the country if you can.[11]

Moreover, there is an urgent pronunciation of the duties of a citizen of the new

country or of the ethics of citizenship within the nation-to-be. In his *Scrap Book,*

Govardhanram makes explicit the reason why he embarks upon the colossal project of

writing this epic-like novel. His aim is to educate and instruct the people who are

going to form the Gujarati *desh.*[12] And yet he conceives his project as outside the

social reform movement.

Experiment with Reform: How to Instruct?

> Mr. Keshavlal Ghodi says I am bound to form some opinion of mine
> on the Consent Age Bill; Mr. Kale said I ought to have joined its
> supporters, unless I was an opponent… I told Mr. Narsinharao Divatia
> once that I would have the Bill but with certain safeguards, and he saw
> an inconsistency in my being for this view… Mr. Keshavlal Ghodi
> thinks everybody must form temporary opinions on the topics of the
> day as a matter of duty… As regards the nature of my opinion in this

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[11] Pandya, Bakshi, and Pandya, eds., *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894 Manuscript Volumes I, II, III, IV-Part (1)*, 234.

[12] Govardhanram speaks of the Gujarati *desh* and I have retained the term *desh* in the original and not translated it as nation, as is popularly done, for we have already seen in the second chapter that the use of the term nation is contentious in the Indian context and if Govardhanram is employing the term *desh*, he probably had in mind something closer to a community or a *genos*.

matter, I have no time or desire to form or draw up *any whole opinion* (emphasis added).[13]

Govardhanram Tripathi, *Scrap Book I*

Govardhanram was wary of the reform movement and critical of his fellow reformers. He saw their idea of reform as one that merely involved taking a stand on controversial issues of the day, issues such as widow remarriage and the Consent Age Bill. Dealing with such issues by themselves was, for Govardhanram, a superficial way of addressing the crisis of a civilization in a situation of flux. He recognized the inadequacy of merely taking a position on issues without attempting a deeper understanding of the predicament that he later called the "stage of transition."[14] He expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which the project of reform was unfolding.

What was this dissatisfaction that Govardhanram was expressing? Was it merely with the way in which social reform movements in India were being conducted? Or had Govardhanram glimpsed the 'unworking'[15] of the idea of reform, its unintelligibility arising from a polysemy in which reform comes to mean the formation of opinions on 'topics of the day'? What did Govardhanram understand as reform?

Educating or marrying my daughter according to European principles may be a reform: but I violate my duty to her the moment I follow out

[13]Pandya, Bakshi, and Pandya, eds., *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894 Manuscript Volumes I, II, III, IV-Part (1)*, 18-19.

[14] Govardhanram Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Bombay: N. M Tripathi Publications, 2001), Preface, ii.

[15] Vivek Dhareshwar, "Politics and History after Sovereignty," in *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, and R. Sudharshan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 419.

> the principle without bestowing the proper amount of thought on the way in which her lot in our present society would be affected thereby. I have seen people punished for overlooking this.
>
> On the other hand it is my duty to see that I am not blindly following a Custom without reference to its perniciousness in the particular case before me.[16]

Education (especially of women), widow remarriage, or marriage according to European principles is reform,[17] whereas continuation of customary practices without adequate reflection would imply a regression, conventionalism, fanaticism and orthodoxy.[18] Govardhanram identifies this dichotomy and rejects it; both reform and custom are equally meaningless without reflection. But what was this reflection that Govardhanram was attempting? We shall leave this question unanswered at this juncture and return to it later.

Despite his dissatisfaction with the idea of reform and his disagreement with fellow reformers, Govardhanram did experiment with the idiom of reform.[19] Dissatisfied with his own lectures and writings as a reformer and disappointed when these writings were not taken too seriously, Govardhanram reasoned that the Gujarati people can only be instructed indirectly—by disguising the instruction in the form of a story—since "the reading class in Gujarat [are], for various reasons, difficult to

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[16] Pandya, Bakshi, and Pandya, eds., *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894 Manuscript Volumes I, II, III, IV-Part (1)*, 41-42.

[17] By what processes did education and widow remarriage come to be considered 'objects' of reform? Within the Indian discourse, we may read this reform as an imitation of the 'civilizing mission' of the colonizers. But why did these aspects of Indian culture become a target of the civilizing process of the liberal West?

[18] This list is unending, we may add to it Brahmanism, nationalism, patriarchy, and even ethnocentrism and eurocentricsm.

[19] A product of this experiment was the publication of essays such as *On the Effects of the Custom of Early Marriages on the Educational Progress of the Natives of India* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1878).

reach through abstruse or discursive matter."[20] Moreover, they would be better able to

draw their own conclusions if the dynamic between the indigenous and the modern is

shown to them rather than being conveyed to them in the form of lectures and essays:

> [T]hat *illustrations of real or ideal life* would be the best medium
> …the ideal and the actual are in some places inseparable (emphasis
> added).[21]

Govardhanram recognizes that the ideal and the real are often inseparable in an

instruction manual. Narrative that is meant to instruct may conflate the boundaries of

the real and the fictive since integrity is to be maintained in the task of instruction, not

in the recording of facts.[22] Furthermore, Govardhanram establishes a link between

instruction in the form of narrative and action:

> Without study there is no sight and without sight no efficiency of
> action. I have been training up…my children, my wife, my brother,
> and my parents. I must do the same for my country…
> 'Sarasvatichandra' thus undertaken at its own point, *works* without
> doubt, and people *feel* the book. This is a mere literary work and will
> work on Society.[23]

While the first two lines quoted above sound like a naive call for education, the next

two lines problematize such a straightforward understanding. If study or education is

the guide to action, what kind of education would *Sarasvatīcandra* provide? We know

from his *Scrap Book* that Govardhanram includes himself among the students when

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[20] Govardhanram Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Bombay: N. M Tripathi Publications, 2001), Intro., 2.

[21] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, vol. 1, Introduction.

[22] We have already discussed this briefly in the fourth chapter and we shall return to it again when we discuss how Govardhanram addresses the representation of the past and the instruction that it provides.

[23] Pandya, Bakshi, and Pandya, eds., *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894 Manuscript Volumes I, II, III, IV-Part (1)*, 31.

he speaks of study as an aid to action or, rather, as informing action.[24] What kind of education or instruction does he envisage as outside of the reformist agenda but crucial to action and necessary for his countrymen?[25] Govardhanram is faced with the dilemma of retaining the traditional institutions that have worked out their own existence while heralding the modern establishment, which, by his own admission, he understands only in half-baked form. While he is attracted by the idea of modernity, he acknowledges the validity of the resistance to it from within the existing social institutions. This resistance, however, does not always manifest itself in the form of dissonance or dissension but often does so in the complete incoherence of the newly encountered system. Within *Sarasvatīcandra* this incoherence is voiced by Kumud Sundari. Outside the novel, it is expressed by letters of protest written to the author, and in rallies, pamphlets and political speeches.

Sarasvatīcandra: The Instruction Manual

> In the first volume, *Sarasvatīcandra* has shown us its strength, a unique art of storytelling is filled in this volume. The characterization is like never before. In the second volume, the Hindu society has been nicely rendered. In the third [Govardhanram's] talent soars, and in the fourth he seems to feel, now if I give everything that I have to give to the world in this volume itself, it would be so nice (translated from Gujarati)![26]
>
> M. K. Gandhi

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[24] In this case action refers not simply to something that is done, or the state of being active, but rather to appropriate action, desirable action, good action or, at least, significant action.

[25] When he speaks of his countrymen, he is speaking not of the Indian people but of the members of the Gujarati *desh*.

[26] Gandhi, M.K. in Mahadevbhai's diary Vol 1, 32. All translations from Hindi and Gujarati are my own except where otherwise indicated.

Govardhanram's *Sarasvatīcandra* was written over fourteen years and brought out in

four volumes that were published in 1887, 1892, 1898 and 1901 respectively. The

form of the novel[27] had still not gained adequate familiarity with its audience in the

Gujarati speaking world.[28] Moreover, the language employed in *Sarasvatīcandra* is

not the language of the common people. *Sarasvatīcandra* has chaste and uneasy

syntax as well as opulent poetry. It is sprinkled liberally with allusions to the classical

poets of Gujarat[29] and is embellished with quotations from Sanskrit and English texts.

The novel thus seemed to be in no danger of becoming a 'bestseller.' This was,

however, exactly what happened. The publication of the first two volumes began to

generate large-scale discussions on the lives of the characters.[30] Debates were held

and camps formed around the outcome of the two protagonists' lives and their

opinions. Letters were written to the author, advising him on how he should resolve

the fate of his characters. These letters came not only from amongst the literati but

also from fellow reformers, schoolteachers, housewives and (those who would today

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[27] The genre of *Sarasvatīcandra* is a controversial issue. But since the author himself refers to it as a novel (and as *navalkathā*), in this chapter I will also refer to it as a novel. This, however, does not resolve the characterization of the writing, which self-consciously takes on the style of an epic, the tone of an instruction manual, and is published in serialized volumes.

[28] Though 'novels' were being published in India as early as 1858 (*Alaler Gharer Dulal* by Priyachand Mitra,), 1864 (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*), 1868 (Nandashankar Mehta's *Karan Ghelo*) and 1872 (Naraharisetty Gopalakrishnama's *Sri Rangaraya Charitra)*, it can be said without much search for evidence that the genre of the novel was yet unfamiliar.

[29] Govardhanram Tripathi has also written a book called *The Classical Poets of Gujarat and Their Influence on Society and Morals*, which was presented before the Wilson College Literary Society, Bombay in 1892 and published two years later. Also see "Salvaging the Immediate Past: Govardhanram Tripathi's The Classical Poets of Gujarat and Their Influence on Society and Morals" in Chandra, *Continuing Dilemma: Understanding Social Consciousness*.

[30] According to Mansukhlal Jhaveri, "The impact of *Sarasvatichandra* on its contemporary readers was phenomenal. Some writers, in imitation, wrote novels in four parts; some, in its style, gave sermons on religion and philosophy; some imitated Goverdhanram in language, style and diction; and one author went to the extent of writing a novel *Pramaddhan ni Prabhuta* in continuation of the story of *Sarasvatichandra*. The educated youth lived in the dreamland of Sarasvatichandra, Kumud and Kusum; and the solution to the problem of love between Sarasvatichandra and Kumud arrived at by Govardhanram became a subject for controversy among scholars and critics for a long time. Sarasvatichandra was translated into Marathi, Hindi and Bengali." Mansukhlal Jhaveri, *History of Gujarati Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1978).

be called) 'conservative revivalists.' An obvious question that may be asked is: how did this varied group of people access this difficult text? But a more crucial question would be: why did the whole region of Gujarati-speaking people want to engage with this book? Although it lacked any of the features required for it to become a success of the kind that other contemporary popular cultural forms were, this novel and its novelist were at the centre of a raging debate in the Gujarati cultural scene for a good two decades. Acclaimed as one of the literary masterpieces in the Gujarati language,[31] *Sarasvatīcandra's* popularity cannot simply be attributed to Govardhanram's undoubted erudition and flawless style. It is perhaps to the story of the lives of Sarasvatichandra and Kumud and to Govardhanram's experiment of instruction/translation that the novel owes its success. The novel was not only able to plug into the key debates that gripped its contemporary society, it also actively sought to frame these debates.

Revaluation of the Responses

The story of *Sarasvatīcandra* begins as a love story and a family drama. However by the end of the second volume it becomes evident, even to those readers who are not acquainted with Govardhanram's *Scrap Book*, that the novel is a discourse on nationhood, citizenship, religious reform and the position and role of women in the new nation. The first two and a half volumes of the novel deal with the story of the protagonists, Sarasvatichandra and Kumud Sundari. Sarasvatichandra represents and speaks for the sensibilities of the growing number of the educated, urban, secular

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[31] Tridip Suhrud even begins his essay on *Sarasvatīcandra* by calling it a "canonical text." In Meenakshi Mukherjee, ed., *Early Novels in India* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002).

citizen. He is the reformer, the man of letters, the "Westoxicated"[32] rational man. His love for reflective deliberations and discussions, his desire to understand and explain, and his explicit condemnation of superstition, place him in almost complete opposition to Kumud Sundari, the woman he loves and wishes to marry. But like Govardharam, Sarasvatichandra is not a ruthless modernist. He too recognizes an intrinsic value in indigenous institutions. Wanting to translate this instinctive admiration for traditional practices, Sarasvatichandra recognizes that the preliminary task is to elaborate, or make explicit, the value of tradition. The purpose of such a task is two-fold: on the one hand it will bring out, as it were, the rationale of tradition, and on the other hand, it would allow a conversation with this tradition. Kumud Sundari, as someone who has internalized the practices of a repressive, hegemonic, patriarchal society, seems to stand in for this tradition. She is portrayed as the embodiment of the values of her community, though what those values are is not clear. She will do nothing that will bring shame either to her paternal family or to the family she has married into. She has always been the obedient daughter and nurturing sister. She marries to become a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. And yet Kumud Sundari is not merely a silent carrier of tradition. She is not only a foil to Sarasvatichandra, but also the only one who can be his partner and companion. Theirs would have been a match of equals according to Vidya Chatur, Kumud's father. As the plot progresses, Kumud Sundari and Sarasvatichandra appear to play out the much-abused roles of the 'traditional' and the 'modern.' We will, as we have already said, examine Kumud Sundari and Sarasvatichandra as representatives of two diverse responses from within the same indigenous society to the colonial encounter. In the process of examining the

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[32] This term was first used by M. K. Gandhi and later by Ashis Nandy. Though it is similar in meaning to the term 'Westernized,' it captures, more vividly, the image of the nineteenth century man under the influence of Western ideas.

responses, this chapter will also attempt to demonstrate why the categories of traditional and modern do not prove useful and in fact obscure what we are trying to understand.

In Terms of the Plot

Sarasvatichandra is sought as an ideal match for Kumud Sundari, the educated and worthy daughter of Gunasundari and Vidya Chatur. The progressive Vidya Chatur has taught his wife to read and write and she, taking easily to knowledge, proves to be a good companion to him, sharing also in his ethical deliberations. Together they decide to educate their two daughters, not only in the skills of the household but also in philosophy and poetry. When Kumud, the elder daughter comes of age, Vidya Chatur is worried. He recognizes the difficulty in finding a groom for Kumud who, unlike several other girls around her, is inclined towards deeper thought and philosophical introspection. To hurl such a girl into a household where she would be restricted to functioning only within the domain of the domestic would be unfair. But when he hears of Sarasvatichandra, he immediately identifies him as the one who would be able to share Kumud Sundari's life. As he had expected, Kumud and Sarasvatichandra grow fond of each other and fall in love. However, due to malicious intrigues within his family, Sarasvatichandra decides to break off the engagement, leaves his home and village, takes on a pseudonym and wanders around dispossessed. He sends a letter to Kumud's father, presenting an explanation for his change of mind, and to Kumud

he sends a letter that contains nothing but a verse.[33] This verse she cherishes, reads

and rereads all the time.

> [S]he knew this verse by rote and yet she would always recite it by
> reading it from the paper, she would look at the paper, recite the verse
> and shed tears… (translated from Gujarati).[34]

This verse is a significant element in the narrative, for it recalls verses and quotations

that Govardhanram himself noted down in his *Scrap Book*. There is nothing in the

content of the verse that should provide Kumud Sundari any solace in her difficult life

but there is something in the reading of this verse that comforts her. Soon after,

Kumud is given in marriage to Pramad Dhan and she settles down into a family that is

largely interested in pursuing wealth and material pleasures. She finds the lack of the

kind of intellectual stimulation that was available in her parents' home stifling. Yet

she performs her domestic duties with sincerity. She has to fulfil her *dharma*, for that

is what she has always been taught. She has brought the small piece of paper on

which the verse is written with her to her marital home too, where she reads it often,

there being no close friends or family with her. Later in the story, after being accused

of being unfaithful, Kumud leaves her husband's house, is suspected of having

drowned and is then found by a band of *sādhvīs*. In a further turn of events, Kumud

Sundari is widowed. Sarasvatichandra now wants to marry her. Apart from his deep

affection for Kumud, his views on the emancipation of women and a desire to pull her

out of the misery of widowhood and solitude make him urge Kumud to accept his

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[33] I have unsatisfactorily translated *śloka* as verse. A *śloka* is a verse, phrase, proverb or song of praise, usually in a specified meter. It comes from the verb *ślokā,* which means to compose. Most often it is a verse of two lines, each of sixteen syllables. *Śloka* is the primary verse form of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*.

[34] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol I, 13. The novel makes use of three languages, English, Gujarati and Sanskrit. I have translated the Gujarati and Sanskrit passages into English and indicated where I have done so.

proposal, be his partner and help him in working towards the realization of a modern liberated nation. For Kumud such an option is unacceptable. Now she has molded herself to the life of a *sādhvī* and a widow, and while she wants to be part of the Independence struggle and the struggle for a free society, she cannot be a part of Sarasvatichandra's life even though she continues to be in love with him. And thus the main story of the novel ends here.[35]

The Inexplicable Ending: What to Instruct?

> The last volume of *Sarasvatichandra* is here offered to the public. It endeavors to complete the program laid down in the preface to the third volume. In that preface it was suggested that the varied conflicts of life and thought at present visible all over India may one day end in *reciprocal assimilation and harmony of the warring elements*…our present state of transition must one day end the effervescence of its lighter elements. That stage over, India must have her day of peace and comfort, and the only question is what kind of day that will be (emphasis added).[36]
>
> Govardhanram Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*

It seems unintelligible to Sarasvatichandra, and increasingly to the modern reader, why Kumud Sundari should choose to live within (and defend) a tradition that represses her. (The text even places Kumud on the periphery of this tradition— amongst the *sādhvīs*.)[37] What is, however, frustrating is that she has no reasons for doing so. There appears to be no available discourse that explains Kumud's choice of

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[35] The Hindi translation of *Sarasvatīcandra* by Padmasingh Sharma 'Kamlesh' (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994) ends at the point at which Kumud Sundari goes back to her life as a *sādhvī*. Thus an entire volume (the fourth and the longest one) is left untranslated.

[36] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol IV, Preface.

[37] This move can be read within the framework of, what Partha Chatterjee calls, the "nationalist resolution of the women's question." However, the publication of the fourth volume provides evidence that there was indeed no such resolution.

living within tradition. There are no explanations of her choices and no justifications

of her worldview. Here it is important to note that, despite the lack of reasons, her

choice is an affirmative one. That is to say, she *chooses* to live with the *sādhvīs* and

not marry Sarasvatichandra. Sarasvatichandra often rejects her choices as an

adherence to religion or tradition, to her sense of duty, and so on. Why are Kumud

Sundari's choices so problematic? Why is it so difficult to attribute agency to her

actions? We have seen in the second chapter an elaboration of the idea of the

individual who *chooses*, in the strong sense of the word, who has reasons that can be

firmly articulated in defense of his/her choice. Kumud does not have any such

reasons. This is not to say that she is inarticulate but, even in her long speeches and

monologues, there seems to be little justification of her actions. The absence of

justification is not just a lack of a rational explanation—there is not even an

articulation of the beliefs upon which she presumably acts.

Kumud's replies to Sarasvatichandra, Chandrakant (Sarasvatichandra's friend

and interlocutor) and her father never take the form of an argument. Her response

follows the pattern of explanation through analogy or proverbs and sayings or often

just of silence. While Kumud Sundari responds to Sarasvatichandra's propositions of

emancipation and modernity with disbelief, surprise, silence and, finally,

disagreement, Kumud's own actions would probably meet with such a response from

modern readers and critics. The novel's contemporary audience, however, reacted

rather differently to the novel. As subsequent volumes were being written readers, and

even non-readers (those who had heard the story), began to articulate a collective

opinion on the fate of Kumud and Sarasvatichandra. Under the mounting pressure of

violent and extreme opinions, Govardhanram Tripathi ended the story by arranging

for Kumud Sundari's sister, Kusum Sundari, to marry Sarasvatichandra so that

Kumud would legitimately be able to assist him in serving society. Whether

Govardhanram was satisfied with this end is a matter of mere speculation. His interest

in this epic story was something more than just the fate of Kumud Sundari. It was, as

he had stated much before beginning the novel, to provide instruction to the people of

his country. The instruction was to take the form of a narrative that *showed* what was

appropriate. Much like the ancient historians we examined in the fourth chapter,

Govardhanram had intended to draw out a set of ideal actions that may be imitable or

conducive to reflection and action. The route that Govardhanram does eventually take

is not one of presenting an instruction manual through a conspicuous display of

idealized characters. What he finally does write is a novel, a realistic representation of

life. It is not instruction but the idiom of reform, which he had formally abandoned,

that returns in the form of the character of Sarasvatichandra. As the novel proceeds,

the desire to modernize, reform, translate and represent completely overtake the

project of the instruction manual. This distinction between the first three volumes,

which still retain a spirit of the instruction manual, and the fourth one, which can be

read as a 'translation' of the idiom of modern Western thought, is manifested as the

distinction between the 'ordinary Indian mind' and the 'educated native.'

The Discursive Divide

> What is popularly called our *stage of transition* has consisted more or
> less of a condition in which the communities, professing to be under
> the influence of one or the other of these civilizations, have been
> startled by the near approach and close contact of the rival
> civilizations, and have at times received one or the other of them with
> curiosity, suspicion and distrust. The part played by the *ordinary
> Indian mind* during this stage has been shown in the first three volumes
> of this work. The present volume is mainly taken up with the part that
> is being played and will be played in that drama by a class of Indians

which has been directly evolved by the actual contact and growing relations of these civilizations themselves. This is the class which is composed of *educated natives* (emphasis added).[38]

Govardhanram Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*

Govardhanram's distinction between these 'educated natives' and the 'ordinary Indian mind' should not be dismissed as the banal distinction between the educated and the uneducated. The education in question here is due to the influence of the British—the "other civilization," as Govardhanram calls them. The educated natives are an outcome of the dialogue with the colonial culture. One way of reading the distinction that Govardhanram draws between the educated natives and the ordinary Indian mind is to see it as part of a revolutionary discourse. The educated natives are like the bourgeoisie who will play a crucial role in transporting India to the next stage of development.[39] Another reading would be to note the distinction between the educated natives and the ordinary Indian mind and read the relationship between them as portrayed in the text as representative of the relationship between actual everyday life and the educated discourses.

The entire fourth volume has been dedicated to the discourses of the educated natives. In this volume the characters of the first three volumes, who had captured the imagination and sympathy of the contemporary audience, find almost no voice. This volume concentrates on a discussion of ideas and ideals inspired by Western thought, or articulated in opposition to it. The first three volumes of the novel are created to facilitate a discussion and exchange of ideas between the ordinary Indian mind and

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[38] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol IV, Introduction, 7.

[39] There is no demonstrable evidence that Govardhanram had read either Hegel or Marx, but based on the entries in his study timetable we may estimate that it is likely that he read both Hegel and Marx as part of his study of Western philosophy and politics.

the educated natives, so as to instruct the ordinary Indian. These volumes follow a pattern of self-conscious questioning of positions, views and opinions. The fourth volume reveals a marked change. This change makes the fourth book appear distinct and unconnected from the previous three volumes.[40] The characterization of Sarasvatichandra is fleshed out completely in this volume. Sarasvatichandra, who is alone and estranged from his society, is out to rejuvenate and mend an old world. He recites long soliloquies and holds lengthy discussions on various social and philosophical subjects with his interlocutors. These dialogues, introspections and quotations about the nature of man and the soul, the condition of the Indian nation, the institution of family and so on are often in the English language! Following passages written in lofty sanskritized Gujarati are the thoughts, opinions and conversations of Sarasvatichandra, which are generously interspersed with comments in Victorian English and supported by large quotations from English poets, novelists, social scientists and philosophers. Why does Sarasvatichandra think in the English language? Why is it that a character placed in the heart of Gujarati culture, relating to a world of Gujarati speakers, needs to reflect in a foreign tongue?[41] Written partially in the Roman script, Sarasvatichandra's ideas are not just anomalies in terms of content, they are in a language that a traditional reader of Gujarati would not be able to access.

If Govardhanram was attempting to put together an epic narrative that would *educate* the Gujarati people to become the citizens of the imminent nation, why would

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[40] So much so that Gandhi says that there is no need to read it! Moreover, though this volume forms the largest chunk of the total content of the book, it is seldom given even a proportionate mention in its translations or abridged editions.

[41] Though we may today debate whether we still want to call English a foreign language, in nineteenth century Gujarat it was definitely an alien tongue. Lapses in Govardhanram's usage of the English language, despite his position as a learned scholar, are evidence of this.

he put forth some of his more crucial pedagogic material in the English language? An easy answer would be that Govardhanram Tripathi meant this novel only for bilingual readers, for those elite and educated people whom he deemed fit subjects of education. Another hypothesis could be that Govardhanram, by writing in English, intended to demonstrate his scholarship. English and Sanskrit were both considered languages of scholarship, especially literary scholarship.[42] While both these reasons may be true, they seem to me to be inadequate explanations for the annoying presence of prose and poetry in both English and Sanskrit. It is also essential to note that Kumud Sundari never speaks (or thinks) in English and neither does Gunsundari, her mother. Both these characters have most definitely been relegated to the domain of tradition. There is thus a (probably inadvertent) pattern in the use of English and Sanskrit.[43] We have to take a more difficult route to an understanding of the fourth volume in the light of Govardhanram's agenda for the novel and his ideas on the encounter of different civilizations. This would perhaps require us to revisit the reading of the first three volumes as well.

Why Kumud Does What She Does

So far the chapter has attempted to summarize the possible characterizations of Sarasvatichandra's position (which is one response to the colonial encounter) with the help of his own discourses in a realm of ideas that has been variously called 'social

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[42] Here it is interesting to note that there is no dearth of Sanskrit in the novel. Umashankar Joshi claims that there are about two hundred lines in Sanskrit in the third volume itself. See the introduction to Govardhanram Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, trans. Padmasingh Sharma 'Kamlesh' (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994). The use of Sanskrit, however, is restricted to quotations from the epics, the *Bhagvada-Gītā*, and so on.

[43] A simplistic one-to-one correspondence between the use of the English language and modernity should be resisted. While an old monkey and a parrot are both made to speak English, Clara, an English girl, speaks in Gujarati, whereas Kusum Sundari replies in English.

reform,' 'modernity,' 'Western ideas,' and so on. This position also reflects

Govardhanram's own mission of molding a new nation-state, which is in turn

categorized as a modernist, reformist or nationalist operation. One can continue in this

vein, an almost endless quibble, on the meaning of these categories and concepts, the

subtle differences between the categories, the search for the appropriate category

within which to place this response, and so forth. This, however, is not a route I find

productive to deal with the responses.[44] Once Sarasvatichandra is identified as

belonging to a body of ideas, however nebulous—to a discourse related to the project

of nation-building, emancipation, historicizing the past, and so on[45]—we can turn to

characterizing the response of Kumud Sundari. Within the novel, Kumud is created as

an ideal and desirable representative of the Indian tradition. It would thus not be

essentialist to speak of her as a metonym for contemporary Indian culture. She,

however, resorts to no discourse to explain or reason out her responses.[46] She

performs her role as a daughter, wife and lover but at no point in the novel does she

stop to reason why she does so, except to say that it is her duty. It appears that to be

able to understand what Kumud does, a '*re-presentation*'[47] of her actions must be

undertaken. A translation of her actions into a comprehensible body of ideas now

[44] A cursory glance at any bibliography on the study of *Sarasvatīcandra* or, broadly, on Indian culture and institutions, would assure us that this route has been exhausted. Furthermore the first four chapters of this thesis have reviewed and examined various representative arguments within this response.

[45] We have already undertaken a more comprehensive investigation of the various positions within such a response, whether nativist, revivalist, reformist, subaltern, postcolonial or postmodern. The basic impulse is to understand and explain, with the help of a body of ideas. The investigative impulse of these ideas is detached from that which they claim to investigate.

[46] Svati Joshi is of the opinion that the novel represents Kumud Sundari as a 'new woman' who is articulate. See Svati Joshi, "Dalpatram and the Nature of Literary Shifts in Nineteenth-Century Ahmedabad," in *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia. (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004). Though Kumud does participate in long conversations and dialogues, and often also monologues, she is rarely ever able to explain her position. Sarasvatichandra's constant paraphrasing of her utterances and actions may be one kind of evidence of her inability to explain her actions.

[47] I owe this term to Vivek Dhareshwar.

becomes absolutely essential. The reader would have to take on the task of the theorist

and extract from Kumud's performance her attitude and response to a social situation,

her intentions and motivations for action, and her moral considerations—in short, a

theory to explain Kumud Sundari. Within the novel this task has been attempted by

Sarasvatichandra himself. As lover and admirer of Kumud, he looks to her as a

repository of 'right actions.' But what are these right actions? What is Kumud's

worldview? Or rather, what is the worldview of the culture within which her actions

are right actions? Thus, in order to understand her actions it becomes necessary for

Sarasvatichandra to pull out of her actions a code to explain her functioning, to give

reasons for her behavior. When in conversation with Kumud, Sarasvatichandra tries

very hard to characterize her, sometimes getting exasperated by her silences and her

explanations, which are often only in the form of pithy sayings and proverbs. Towards

the end of the fourth volume of the novel, Sarasvatichandra and Kumud Sundari find

themselves alone with each other in an isolated cave.

> Sarasvatichandra: Come sit here near me on this bench—I will explain
> why *vāsanā*[48] too can have its uses.

> Kumud Sundari: No I am fine sitting on the ground. It is best to keep
> fire away from the butter.

> Sarasvatichandra: That is also true and in bringing it to my notice you
> have pointed me to the root of your freedom from physical desires.
> Kumud Sundari! You have indeed understood the idea of destroying
> physical desires, and along with the understanding you also lend the
> strength to do so (translated from Gujarati).[49]

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[48] I have translated *vāsanā* simply as physical desires. The original term implies the traces of the
memory of experiences that create a desire for and expectation of the reliving of those experiences. For
this explanation I am grateful to Narahari Rao.

[49] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol IV, 468.

Their conversations typically progress in this manner throughout the novel, with Sarasvatichandra paraphrasing Kumud's actions or pithy sayings. In his representation of her, Kumud's uncomplicated and sometimes fairly ritualistic actions appear either as caricatures or as significant pointers to a deep philosophy; a philosophy to which she herself has no access. Following the conversation that I have quoted above, Sarasvatichandra goes on to explain to Kumud how her own actions are an attempt to destroy physical desires. He then goes on to elaborate why, nevertheless, there is some reason for, and value to, the existence of physical desires. Several things are happening here. Kumud's action of not wanting to sit close to a man she loves, in seclusion, on a stormy night, in a cave, may just be an action signifying nothing but the action in itself. In representing it, Sarasvatichandra makes it an *ethical code*, and attributes it to Kumud's character. She now becomes for him someone who believes in the destruction of physical desires, even though the action of a woman not wanting to indulge in physical proximity with her former lover need not present any glimpse into the philosophy of destroying desire. Moreover, in reading her actions as an indicator of her 'essence' or 'essential nature,' Sarasvatichandra keeps getting entangled in a loop. As soon as he is able to extract one essential characteristic, Kumud defies the norm that is supposed to govern her characteristic behavior and acts in a completely contrary manner. For instance, she does not speak of a freedom from physical desires to her sister, Kusum Sundari, who she thinks should marry Sarasvatichandra. In fact to Kusum, who wants to live her life independently, Kumud speaks of the need for a companion and of the desire for the smaller pleasures of everyday living which she will indeed experience but will not be able to fulfil in a solitary or independent life. But when asked by a friend about her relationship with Sarasvatichandra, she explains to her the duties of a married woman.

Kumud: Sister, the *dharma* of duty towards one's husband is similar from all avenues, and I have decided not to stray away from that.

Bansari: Malati had also taken a decision which in that instance was also counted as *dhārmika*…

Kumud: Malati did not have questions like mine. On the one hand was the approval of her parents and on the other was her beloved—she only had to decide as to which of the two she wanted to please. Like me, she did not have the wicked yearning to break away from the bonds of her wedded husband. I have decided that I want to stay away from such a yearning (translated from Gujarati).[50]

On reading a conversation such as this it is possible for critics to characterize Kumud as part of a dogmatic and resistant old tradition. Again, on finding out about her husband's death, when Kumud weeps uncontrollably, Sarasvatichandra cannot understand her remorse or sorrow. She has, after all, left her husband's home. She has defied her community and escaped to join the *sādhvīs*. Then why now does she want to go back to fulfilling her *dharma* as a widow?

Kumud! If the world sees you as a monument of rebellion, what is their fault in it? In the same heart in which you feel such affection for me, you also feel sorrow for Pramad Dhan. It is this characteristic that is caricatured as 'women's nature'…[51]

And then, quoting Alexander Pope he writes,

Woman's at best a contradiction still![52]

It may seem, to Sarasvatichandra and to the modern critic, that Kumud's essential characteristic is only inconsistency! This, however, does not seem adequate as an

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[50] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol IV, 248.

[51] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol IV, 559.

[52] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol IV, 559.

explanation. Kumud cannot be both dogmatic and inconsistent. She cannot embody

the voice of a resilient tradition and also be rendered a new woman[53] who exercises

her agency by making concrete choices. Given the responses to her, we can at least

say that there appears to be some difficulty in characterizing Kumud. Any attempt at

articulating or representing her actions only results in codifying them. The only other

way of characterizing Kumud Sundari, so it appears to me, is as someone who is a

consistent actor within a culture, the set of ideas of which Sarasvatichandra is unable

to *articulate*. Here I wish to stress the word articulate and hope to distinguish it from

understand, since being part of the same culture it seems unlikely that

Sarasvatichandra does not understand Kumud's responses. Also, his love and empathy

for Kumud and admiration for and praise of her good and truthful conduct would

imply that he can, at least intuitively, follow her set of actions. It is only in trying to

represent them in a certain manner that he tends to either caricature them or do

violence to them. In enclosing them within the framework of a discourse the actions

appear either unintelligible or evasive.

Representing the 'Belief System' of Tradition

> The groundwork of that epic [the *Mahābhārata*] has so much in
> common with some of the leading ideas worked out by modern social
> and political speculations that *it has been found possible to translate
> the latter into the terms of the former* supplemented by other similar
> materials drawn from our ancient literature and modern popular
> beliefs, even where the beliefs are, to all appearance, superstitions. It is
> expected that such a use of those materials will enable the ordinary
> Indian mind to grasp and appreciate Western ideas and ideals to some
> extent and to some useful purpose (emphasis added).[54]
>
>   Govardhanram Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*

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[53] Here the dichotomies of tradition and modernity appear to have broken down; Kumud, who is seen
as the representative of tradition also gets categorized as the 'new woman.'

[54] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Preface, 6.

The fourth volume of *Sarasvatīcandra* marks the realization of the futility of the attempt to even articulate Kumud's action. The task of translation presumably becomes possible only after some level of proficiency in the source and target language is achieved. It was the task of the first three volumes to create the ground on which a conversation could be held. This dialogue was meant to have occurred between the two central characters: Sarasvatichandra, tentatively upholding a Western flame, representing the educated natives and Kumud, acting in accordance with the traditional system, the ordinary Indian mind. In his preface to the fourth volume, Govardhanram has elaborated on what he calls the 'stage of transition'—resulting from the confluence of the diverse civilizations of the modern West and the contemporary East—that India is witnessing. Addressing this stage of transition was the prime motivation for the four volumes of *Sarasvatīcandra*. But in the face of the break down of the conversation between the two sets of ideas, Govardhanram introduces an essential third element that is supposed to make it possible to blend the essence of these two civilizations into a "reciprocal assimilation and harmony of the warring elements." Govardhanram locates this third element in 'ancient Indian civilization.' He argues that Indian civilization cannot be spoken of as a monolith. The modern East (or even just modern India) has undergone certain changes due to historical contingencies, and now exhibits a marked distance in "modes of thought and life" from the ancient culture. Govardhanram sees the present moment as evolving from the past and yet different from the past. To make sense of the present, he feels one needs an understanding of past from which the present moment gets its identity. History thus becomes the only access to knowledge of the present.

The first three volumes of the novel attempt to study the modern Eastern culture as it engaged with the modern Western culture. This is done by observing and recording the ordinary Indian mind and its response to the newly encountered civilization. The results of this observation and representation did not seem to appeal to Govardhanram. He notes the incomprehension of Kumud Sundari and the blankness or skepticism of his readers when confronted with the new-fangled ideas. As the novel progresses, the fervor of imparting *instruction* mellows into a need to *translate* the ideas of the ideal ordinary Indian into a language that can allow conversation with modern Western ideas. Further there is also a desire to translate the knowledge of Western civilization in a manner that makes it accessible and readable to the ordinary Indian. Though, in effect, the impulse to instruct is still present in the novel, the understanding of what it means to instruct changes drastically. Instruction now involves, not the study of ideal or imitable actions from the canvas of a narrative, but rather a representation or a translation of that which is true. The truth may not always be available in superficial everyday actions but in the belief system underlying those actions. And the English were indeed better able to grasp this belief system than any native. Thus Govardhanram turns to the Western understanding of the ordinary Indian mind.

> I justify the Congress because of the confidence in Hume and
> Wedderburn… But in other matters our leaders are unfit. In view of
> these things, I would like to leave many things to our rulers rather than
> to our native leaders, for the former are at least most sensible people:
> look, for instance, how the best stuff even on our Subjects are spoken
> by Englishmen, and not by natives.[55]

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[55] Pandya, Bakshi, and Pandya, eds., *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1888-1894 Manuscript Volumes I, II, III, IV-Part (1)*, 24.

Past as Knowledge

> The Mahabharata is to form the starting point of my Pauranic,
> institutional, historical economical and social studies and writings, as
> suggested in the 4th Vol. of my novel. The complexities of Hindu
> Civilization have their roots in these and other cognate works, and no
> study of our existing institutions…can be perfect for India unless it
> also aims at deriving such light as a historical and critical study of
> these works can give. The brains of our people require being
> remodeled only after these lights can illumine every nook and corner
> of our Hindu mind before the Western glare can be allowed to nourish
> those parasites amongst us… [56]
>
> Govardhanram Tripathi, *Scrap Book I*

One of the aims of *Sarasvatīcandra* is to acquire the level of proficiency in the

languages that is required for translating from the language of the modern West to that

of contemporary India. A translation without satisfactory knowledge of the languages

involved could only be a perverted translation manual. Neither the reformers nor the

revivalists are able to offer an adequate grammar, as it were, of the language of

modern India. Sarasvatichandra too is unable to offer any systematic understanding of

the idiom of Kumud Sundari. Her actions in the present do not appear, in themselves,

to offer any understanding. And Sarasvatichandra is unable to extract an adequate

belief system to explain her actions. The marriage of the educated natives with the

ordinary Indian mind has failed due to Sarasvatichandra's inability to translate the

language that Kumud Sundari speaks. He seems to understand what she says but finds

himself unable to translate it. Moreover, he also fails to translate for her the new

language that he wants to share with her. Fearing an imminent disintegration of a

necessary companionship, Govardhanram turns to ancient Indian culture. In ancient

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[56] Kantilal C. Pandya, Ramprasad P. Bakshi, and Sanmukhlal J. Pandya, *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1894- 1904 Manuscript Volumes IV-Part (2), V and VI* (Bombay: N. M. Tripathi Pr. Ltd., 1959), 244.

culture he hopes to find a common language in which Sarasvatichandra and Kumud can communicate. The only way in which Govardhanram hopes to find some kind of understanding of Indian society is by turning to its past. Having shaped the present moment, the past would indeed have an explanation for the present. Govardhanram believes that ancient Indian culture is closer to contemporary Indian culture than is modern Western culture, for, after all, the roots of contemporary culture, even if they are temporarily forgotten, lie in the ancient culture. Moreover, Govardhanram also believes that the language of the ancient culture would be more conducive and receptive to a translation project, not only because it offers an understanding of the present, but because it also contains, as it were, the present in a purer form. That is to say, the essence of the present, which is largely derived from the past, may be available in the past without the dilutions and corruptions of time. We may infer that Govardhanram has unconsciously recognized the inability of the modern Western idiom to present any serious understanding of the Indian experience. Therefore he proposes a turn to the past that he hopes will provide him with an adequate language.

The *Mahābhārata* becomes an introduction to the past, an embodiment of the past. It is taken up as a study of the *history* of India. In the fourth chapter we briefly mentioned how epics, chronicles, poetry, genealogies all began to be read for an understanding of the past of India. Govardhanram too reads the *Mahābhārata* as offering a truth about the Indian past. In the fourth volume several debates and discourses are held to enlighten the orthodox characters with the *real* meaning of the *Paurānika* texts. One such attempt is to demonstrate that the *Mahabharata* itself embodies something that can be called "the Spirit of Progress." But while one tendency is to understand the *Mahābhārata* as history, or as a philosophical history,

there is also suspicion towards such a reading. While the modern idiom is employed

in our understanding of our experience, no amount of intuition will allow us to break

away from the constraints of the language. Thus one of the participants of the debate

on the *Mahābhārata*, Virarao, says:

> [W]e should be fools without common sense to accept the pedantry of these far-fetched allegories. Surely our hoary Vyasa[57] had no idea of any of these interpretations of his simple designs. I am sure the bard contemplated neither your Spirit of Prestige and Power, nor your Angel of Progress when he penned his bulky volumes to bring into one place, his heterogeneous mass of fictions, adages, and nursery-tales— and may be experiences…we shall see what Spirit of Progress you can spin out of old man Vyasa. Only see that you don't make things too comical for my prosaic wits.[58]

Virarao's frustration with the *Mahābhārata* is understandable. It is the same

frustration that one section of modern historians of India experienced when

attempting to read the epics and chronicles as history. The epics neither demonstrate a

historical understanding nor a philosophical truth. The attribution of historical truth

and philosophical profundity to the epic only make it appear more and more comical.

The dialogues on the *Mahābhārata* rattle on emptily and more and more

quotations from Sanskrit and English begin to appear at increasingly shorter intervals.

Little evidence is available of the successful communication of the ideas these

quotations are supposed to contain. The translation of Western ideas with the help of

ancient Indian texts thus also reaches a point at which the whole exercise begins to

look like an assemblage of disjointed quotations. The fourth volume reads like a large

diary of fragmentary quotations from English philosophers and poets placed alongside

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[57] Vyasa is recognized as the author of the epic *Mahābhārata*.

[58] Tripathi, *Sarasvatīcandra*, Vol. IV, 175-177.

extracts from the *Mahābhārata*, *Bhagvada-Gītā* and other Sanskrit texts. The failure of instruction and translation results in a portrayal of disparate fragments of the three civilizations as Govardhanram understands them. The only way to lend coherence to these stray pieces of ideas, it would seem, would be to present them in their own language. These fragments convey little to the characters within the novel and even less to the readers outside of it.

Pattern of the Experiment: An Attempt to Extract a Framework

Govardhanram's experiment seems to have failed. He gave up the study and practice of law in the British courts in the pursuit of an understanding of his contemporary society. After a brief experiment early in his intellectual career he abandoned the reformist movement when he recognized that neither he nor his fellow reformers had an adequate understanding of the traditional institutions of his society, which they were trying to reform. Rather than investigate the language and the impulse to reform, Govardhanram created *Sarasvatīcandra* in the hope of instructing his people. The early stages of this instruction manual were intelligible and thus the first two volumes of *Sarasvatīcandra* roused a large debate amongst both, the educated natives and the ordinary Indian people. But Govardhanram was unhappy with the response of his contemporaries. His experiment with a conversation between the ideas of the East and West had reached a dead-end since he was unable to synthesize the ideas of the educated natives and the ideal ordinary Indian mind. He continued with renewed vigor in the attempt to represent Kumud Sundari, the embodiment of the ordinary Indian mind. Kumud Sundari, however proved a difficult subject to represent. Though she herself had the tools for reflection and deliberation, she did not provide any characterization of her own actions. Furthermore, even Sarasvatichandra was unable

to represent her, though he did try to explain her actions, sometimes even to her. But Kumud never negated his explanations of her actions, and she often agreed with his interpretations of her nature. It is quite evident, however, that while Sarasvatichandra had not been able to arrive at any comprehensive understanding of Kumud, Kumud herself was oblivious to the impulse to explain her actions. The novel abandoned Kumud temporarily, and turned to a study of history, of that history which might give intelligibility to present day Kumud Sundari. The study of history in search of the truth about the past proved equally unsuccessful and the novel ended in complete incoherence.

A pattern similar to Govardhanram's experiments can be found in the response of the critics of the novel to the character of Kumud Sundari.[59] The critical readings of the novel, unlike immediate responses from the readers, follow two patterns. The first kind of reading relegates the actions of Kumud Sundari to the realm of superstitious and irrational beliefs. The response that follows is that of a reformist call. Kumud can be seen as a site for instruction. Another similar reading of the text, which I identify as the second pattern, recognizes Kumud as one who holds the key to the worldview of a culture and subjects her to meticulous and thorough scrutiny. The first position can easily be dismissed since it is unmindful of the fact that Govardhanram himself took great care not to fall into the simplistic reformist trap. He recognized that Kumud or modern Indian culture cannot merely be a site for instruction or a subject of reform:

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[59] This response can be discussed at length, but in this chapter, for my purpose, it would suffice to demonstrate and make explicit the pattern that it follows.

> India has reason to pause and note whether the sacrifice of *its own old views and modes of life* in favor of their counterparts in Europe commands a balance on the credit or the debit side (emphasis added).[60]

The second and more interesting reading, which aims at a sympathetic understanding of these 'views and modes of life,' can now also be shown to be the very method by which a mode of theorization (exemplified by our protagonist) renders a culture or strand of thought inaccessible to itself. Sarasvatichandra's descriptions of Kumud's actions, aimed at making those actions better understood, are unintelligible to Kumud herself. Kumud seems to belong to a culture without a worldview. If we explore Kumud's actions to seek principles governing or even underlying them, we find that there are none. Can an enquiry into the worldview of this way of making sense of the world be an appropriate, or even meaningful, project? This incessant exercise of codification, taken up in an attempt to mould the action-knowledge[61] of a culture into a discourse, obfuscates any route to an understanding of the functioning of that culture. That is to say: to represent a domain that escapes codification would essentially be to do violence to that domain. A domain that resists, defies or escapes codification can easily be recognized by the patterns of responses to it. A codification exercise would generate seemingly contradictory conclusions. The domain will appear to theorists, at the same time, both extremely rich in philosophical deliberations and

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[60] Pandya, Bakshi, and Pandya, *Govardhanram Tripathi's Scrap Book 1894- 1904 Manuscript Volumes IV-Part (2), V and VI*, 36.

[61] While I am aware that in using the concept 'action-knowledge' I stand the risk of not being able to defend the application of this category entirely, I find this concept most useful, even as a tentative description, when speaking of the position occupied by Kumud. For a further understanding of the concept see S. N. Balagangadhara, "Comparative Anthropology and Action Sciences: An Essay on Knowing to Act and Acting to Know," *Philosophica* 40, no. 2 (1987). Also see Vivek Dhareshwar, "Valorizing the Present: Orientalism, Postcoloniality and the Human Sciences," *Cultural Dynamics* 10, no. 2 (1998).

also surprisingly superficial.[62] These responses, however, should be read not as the failure of individual attempts at articulating the salience or features of the domain, but as necessary products of the very exercise of codification of that domain. While these responses are articulated with the well-meaning aim of translating the workings of the political systems or institutions in India into the Western idiom, it is unclear what this process of translation actually does. The language needing explanation and translation is perhaps the language of Sarasvatichandra itself. Govardhanram's instruction manual may have begun with the intention of instructing and educating the citizen-to-be; what it does end up doing is to present, in a garbled form, a manual of translation that has, as yet, not helped translate anything.

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[62] Nietzsche seems to have captured the essence of this exercise in his declaration that the Greeks were superficial out of profundity. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Conclusion

Knowing Ourselves: Representation and Practice

> Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path
> of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are
> convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our
> mind and our passions. So doing, *we know ourselves*. The Gujarati
> equivalent for civilization means 'good conduct' (emphasis added).[1]
>
> <div align="right">M. K. Gandhi, Indian Home Rule</div>

The negotiations between the indigenous people and the colonial culture generated a

variety of responses or texts through the colonial period. These texts and responses

were grappling with the orientalist/colonial representations of ourselves, often unable

to recognise ourselves within it. Speaking, as it were, to these representations, these

late nineteenth and early twentieth century texts attempted to make sense of ourselves

within the modern idiom. Govardhanram Tripathi's *Sarasvatīcandra*, was one such

attempt. Along the same trajectory, we may place M. K. Gandhi's *Hind Svarāj.*

Written in 1922, Gandhi himself translated it into English in 1938, translating the title

as *Indian Home Rule.* In the English translation, Gandhi seems to be speaking of two

different civilizations: the Indian civilization and the Western civilization. The terms

that Gandhi translates as 'civilization' are '*sudhāro'* and '*kudhāro.'* The term *kudhāro*

is not consistently used to speak of the Western civilization and is used also to

describe the 'modern civilization' in India. Further Gandhi also writes that the English

people are not "bad at heart" but it is their civilization that is responsible for their

degeneration and degradation. How does Gandhi understand civilization, if not as its

people and their practices, as a people shaped by their historical experience? A more

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[1] M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1938).

literal translation of the original passage may help us to understand what he means by

civilization:

> *Sudhāro* is that conduct which shows man how to perform his duty. To
> perform his duty, is to adopt ethical conduct. To adopt ethical conduct
> is to be able to gain control over ones mind and senses. In doing so, we
> know ourselves. This itself is *su-* as in 'good' practice. What is
> converse to it is *kudhāro*.[2]

We may now be able to appreciate why the terms '*sudhāro*' and '*kudhāro*' are not

simply synonymous with Indian civilization and Western civilization, respectively.

The Indian 'civilization' or '*sudhāro*' can also become a '*kudhāro,*' as Gandhi

suspects it will if we continue to follow the '*kudhāro*' that the West has introduced to

us. This also explains why Gandhi is able to say that it is not the British people but

their '*kudhāro*' that is at fault. In his invitation to the Western people to adopt a

'*sudhāro*' he was not inviting them to adopt Indian nationalism (sic) but in fact to

adopt a practice that will assist in 'knowing ourselves.'[3] The *kudhāro* of the West

does not make available a way to understand or know ourselves. This experience-

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[2] M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Svarāj* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Prakashan, 1922). I have retained the prefix *'su'* in the original form since there is no prefix in English that ascribes positive value to terms such as 'conduct' (*sunītī*), 'victory' (*suyaś*), 'property' (*sudhan*), and so on. *'Su'* can be translated as 'good.' I have translated the term '*nītī*' as 'ethical conduct.' It can also be translated as morality, propriety, or even politics. In this case the term 'ethical code' seems most apt to me. *Indrīyā* has been translated as 'passion,' I have translated it as 'senses.' Finally I have translated *dhāro* as 'practice' and not as conduct. The term '*dhāro*' implies a custom or a practice or a rule rather than individual conduct or behaviour. The last sentence has been left out of the English translation. We may deduce that *kudhāro* refers to 'bad practices' or bad customs.

[3] This idea of 'knowing ourselves' is not to be mistaken as a psychological understanding of individuals or their culture. This knowledge of ourselves may be better understood as the Greek '*gnothi seauton*' (know yourself) which is, after all a part of the culture of '*epimeleia heautou*' (care of the self). This is also demonstrated by Gandhi's insistence on practice as a way of knowing ourselves. Also see Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-1982*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) and Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 3 vols., vol. 3, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

excluding character of their *kudhāro* is what is deplorable about the West, according to Gandhi.[4]

In our study of *Sarasvatīcandra*, we were able to observe in detail the effect of this experience-excluding character of the Western mode of interpreting the different domains of Indian experience. We observed that this mode of representation is unable to understand what Govardhanram called the 'ordinary Indian mind.' The Indian intelligentsia, represented by Govardhanram and his protagonist, Sarasvatichandra, may have been able to make some intuitive sense of this 'ordinary Indian mind' but they too are unable to present any coherent articulation of it. Govardhanram's experiment with cultural translation alerted us to the inability of the Western idiom and the contemporary Indian lexicon, both part of what Gandhi calls *kudhāro,* to make sense of ourselves.

By viewing the Indian political discourse itself, crystallized as a discourse on democracy, as such an experiment, this thesis has tried to examine this discourse through a more systematic formulation of the relationship between 'politics' and the language used to understand it. Using Quentin Skinner's interrogations of Raymond Williams's thesis on the relationship between language and culture, we observed that the terms of Western political thought displayed peculiar characteristics when employed to articulate Indian political realities. These terms embodied no common concept that answered to the various uses of the terms and yet they retained a strong evaluative force. While our experience escapes this language, the language in turn

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[4] In an unpublished manuscript Vivek Dhareshwar argues that Gandhi critiques colonialism because it is "destructive of the very integrity of experience." Vivek Dhareshwar, "Cognitive Enslavement and the Integrity of Experience: Gandhi, the Gita, and Action without Conception," (Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, 2006).

tries to mould our experience. The retained evaluative force constitutes itself as the discourses of nationalism, reform, revival, development politics and so on that provide a normative force to our politics, but no explanatory power.

To better understand this strange feature of the terms of contemporary political theory we turned to Foucaultian genealogy to investigate the source of their intelligibility and understand how they have become categories of political analysis. Through a study of the concepts of nation-state, citizenship and history, we saw how a particular historical trajectory—what Michel Foucault calls "the historical ontology of the West"— and the subjectivities that it created are constitutive of, and lend intelligibility to, the contemporary political lexicon. For Foucault this is the product of a long convoluted process of norming different domains. We noted how, once thus constituted, this singular historical experience comes to frame, through the process of norming and dialecticization, the experience of all other cultures and peoples, rendering them pale variants of Western culture. This process is isomorphic to what Edward Said has called 'Orientalism.' However, as we have seen, the categories forged in this process are not restricted to Orientalist knowledge understood narrowly, but also form central analytic categories of political theory in India.

This investigation has thrown up a number of questions. Can a self-characterization of the East escape the limits that were placed on the Western understanding of the East? Is it possible for the East to represent itself? With what language can it do so? Can we make the modern language of politics our own?

Contemporary postcolonial theorists have addressed some of these questions.[5] Building on their work, this thesis has tried to systematically explicate the relationship between culture and the domain of politics, a relationship that, I have tried to show, needs to be mapped before a positive study of Indian politics can begin. We have seen how the domain we know as 'Indian politics,' and thus also the language used to understand it, is constituted by the specific cultural experience of the West and therefore any attempt to represent Indian politics, falls inadvertently, into an Orientalist pattern. To provide alternative conceptualizations of the domain of experience that we have been calling 'politics' would require that we begin deconstructing the contemporary idiom. This thesis is but a step in that direction.

While the thesis does express some basic concerns about the attempt to provide alternative conceptualizations of the domain of politics in India, it presents the possibility of such alternatives through brief discussions of the work of Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi and the writings of the ancient Greeks. Significant methodological and substantive issues involved in constructing an alternative framework can be found in the writing s of Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ashis Nandy and Uday Mehta and in a philosophical way in the work of Akeel Bilgrami and S. N.

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[5] This thesis draws some of its questions from the works of S. N. Balagangadhara, Akeel Bilgrami, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, Uday Mehta and Ashis Nandy. See S.N. Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness…: Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi, the Philosopher," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 39 (September 2003), Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks For "Indian" Pasts," *Representations* (Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories), no. 37 (Winter 1992), Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), Sudipta Kaviraj, "On State, Society and Discourse in India," in *Rethinking Third World Politics*, ed. James Manor (London: New York, 1991), Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: India in British Liberal Thought* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles," *History and Theory* 34, no. 2 (May 1995).

Balgangadhara.[6] This thesis has tried to contribute to that endeavour by critically

building on the insights of these thinkers.

This thesis has investigated the language in which we have been represented and

with which we continue to try to make sense of ourselves. It has tried to show that this

language is a problematic one. It is not only otiose but also one that violates our

experience. Whether this is a problem of the idiom of our theorization, or whether it is

a manifestation of a larger problem with representation itself remains to be seen. As

yet there exists only one idiom of representation, one arising from the theoretical

tendency of the West. Can this language be further smelted to mould it to our

experience? Or will we have to incinerate it altogether? Will a new lexicon emerge

from its ashes? Or will we be able to make sense of ourselves without representing

ourselves? The thesis will have achieved its aims if it persuades scholars to see the

immense significance of the questions that its investigation raises—questions that go

to the very basis of how we understand, learn and, therefore, constitute our cultural

life.

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[6] Also see Dhareshwar, "Cognitive Enslavement and the Integrity of Experience: Gandhi, the Gita, and Action without Conception."

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