ONE

## The Nation in Heterogeneous Time

I

My subject is popular politics in most of the world. When I say "pop-ular," I do not necessarily presume any particular institutional form or process of politics. I do, however, suggest that much of the politics I describe is conditioned by the functions and activities of modern governmental systems that have now become part of the expected functions of governments everywhere. These expectations and activ-ities have produced, I will argue, certain relations between govern-ments and populations. The popular politics I will describe grows upon and is shaped by those relations. What I mean by "most of world" will, I hope, become clearer as I proceed. I mean, in a general sense, those parts of the world that were not direct participants in the history of the evolution of the institutions of modern capitalist de-mocracy. "Modern capitalist democracy" might, in a loose way, be taken to mean the modern West. But, as I will indicate, the modern West has a significant presence in many modern non-Western soci-eties, just as, indeed, there are large sectors of contemporary Western society that are not necessarily part of the historical entity known as the modern West. However, if I were to make a rough estimate of the number of people in the world who would be, in a conceptual sense, included within my description of popular politics, I would say that I am talking of the political life of well over three-fourths of contem-porary humanity.

The familiar concepts of social theory that I will need to revisit here are civil society and state, citizenship and rights, universal affil-

iations and particular identities. Since I will look at popular politics, I must also consider the question of democracy. Many of these concepts will no longer look familiar after I position my lenses and persuade you to look through them. Civil society, for instance, will appear as the closed association of modern elite groups, sequestered from the wider popular life of the communities, walled up within enclaves of civic freedom and rational law. Citizenship will take on two different shapes—the formal and the real. And unlike the old way, known to us from the Greeks to Machiavelli to Marx, of talking about the rulers and the ruled, I will invite you to think of those who govern and those who are governed. Governance, that new buzzword in policy studies, is, I will suggest, the body of knowledge and set of techniques used by, or on behalf of, those who govern. Democracy today, I will insist, is not government of, by and for the people. Rather, it should be seen as the politics of the governed.

I will clarify and elaborate on my conceptual arguments in chapter 2. To introduce my discussion of popular politics, let me begin by posing for you a conflict that lies at the heart of modern politics in most of the world. It is the opposition between the universal ideal of civic nationalism, based on individual freedoms and equal rights irrespective of distinctions of religion, race, language, or culture, and the particular demands of cultural identity, which call for the differential treatment of particular groups on grounds of vulnerability or backwardness or historical injustice, or indeed for numerous other reasons. The opposition, I will argue, is symptomatic of the transition that occurred in modern politics in the course of the twentieth century from a conception of democratic politics grounded in the idea of popular sovereignty to one in which democratic politics is shaped by governmentality.

Benedict Anderson captured the universal ideal of civic nationalism well when he argued, in his now classic Imagined Communities, that the nation lives in homogeneous empty time.[1] In this, he was, in fact, following a dominant strand in modern historical thinking that imagines the social space of modernity as distributed in homogeneous empty time. A Marxist could call this the time of capital. Anderson explicitly adopts the formulation from Walter Benjamin and uses it

to brilliant effect to show the material possibilities of large anonymous socialities being formed by the simultaneous experience of reading the daily newspaper or following the private lives of popular fictional characters. It is the same simultaneity experienced in homogeneous empty time that allows us to speak of the reality of such categories of political economy as prices, wages, markets, and so on. Empty homogeneous time is the time of capital. Within its domain, capital allows for no resistance to its free movement. When it encounters an impediment, it thinks it has encountered another time—something out of pre-capital, something that belongs to the pre-modern. Such resistances to capital (or to modernity) are therefore understood as coming out of humanity's past, something people should have left behind but somehow haven't. But by imagining capital (or modernity) as an attribute of time itself, this view succeeds not only in branding the resistances to it as archaic and backward, but also in securing for capital and modernity their ultimate triumph, regardless of what some people may believe or hope, because after all, time does not stand still.

In his recent book The Spectre of Comparisons, Anderson has followed up his analysis in Imagined Communities by distinguishing between nationalism and the politics of ethnicity. He does this by identifying two kinds of seriality that are produced by the modern imaginings of community. One is the unbound seriality of the everyday universals of modern social thought: nations, citizens, revolutionaries, bureaucrats, workers, intellectuals, and so on. The other is the bound seriality of governmentality: the finite totals of enumerable classes of population produced by the modern census and the modern electoral systems. Unbound serialities are typically imagined and narrated by means of the classic instruments of print-capitalism, namely, the newspaper and the novel. They afford the opportunity for individuals to imagine themselves as members of larger than face-to-face solidarities, of choosing to act on behalf of those solidarities, of transcending by an act of political imagination the limits imposed by traditional practices. Unbound serialities are potentially liberating. Bound serialities, by contrast, can operate only with integers. This implies that for each category of classification, any individual can

count only as one or zero, never as a fraction, which in turn means that all partial or mixed affiliations to a category are ruled out. One can only be black or not black, Muslim or not Muslim, tribal or not tribal, never only partially or contextually so. Bound serialities, Anderson suggests, are constricting and perhaps inherently conflictual. They produce the tools of ethnic politics.

Anderson uses this distinction between bound and unbound serialities to make his argument about the residual goodness of nationalism and the unrelieved nastiness of ethnic politics. Clearly, he is keen to preserve what is genuinely ethical and noble in the universalist critical thought characteristic of the Enlightenment. Faced with the indubitable facts of historical conflict and change, the aspiration here is to affirm an ethical universal that does not deny the variability of human wants and values, or cast them aside as unworthy or ephemeral, but rather encompasses and integrates them as the real historical ground on which that ethical universal must be established. Anderson, in the tradition of much progressive historicist thinking in the twentieth century, sees the politics of universalism as something that belongs to the very character of the time in which we live. He speaks of "the remarkable planetary spread, not merely of nationalism, but of a profoundly standardized conception of politics, in part by reflecting on the everyday practices, rooted in industrial material civilization, that have displaced the cosmos to make way for the world."[2] Such a conception of politics requires an understanding of the world as *one*, so that a common activity called politics can be seen to be going on *everywhere*. One should note that time in this conception easily translates into space, so that we should indeed speak here of the time-space of modernity. Thus, politics, in this sense, inhabits the empty homogeneous time-space of modernity.

I disagree. I believe this view of modernity, or indeed of capital, is mistaken because it is one-sided. It looks at only one dimension of the time-space of modern life. People can only imagine themselves in empty homogeneous time; they do not live in it. Empty homogeneous time is the utopian time of capital. It linearly connects past, present, and future, creating the possibility for all of those historicist imaginings of identity, nationhood, progress, and so on that Anderson, along

with many others, have made familiar to us. But empty homogeneous time is not located anywhere in real space—it is utopian. The real space of modern life consists of heterotopia. (My debt to Michel Foucault should be obvious, even if I am not always faithful to his use of this term.)[3] Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. Here, even industrial workers do not all internalize the work-discipline of capitalism, and more curiously, even when they do, they do not do so in the same way. Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian.

Homi Bhabha, describing the location of the nation in temporality, pointed out a few years ago how the narrative of the nation tended to be split into a double time and hence an inevitable ambivalence: in one, the people were an object of national pedagogy because they were always in the making, in a process of historical progress, not yet fully developed to fulfill the nation's destiny; but in the other, the unity of the people, their permanent identification with the nation, had to be continually signified, repeated, and performed.[4] I will illustrate some of the instances of this ambivalence and argue that they are an inevitable aspect of modern politics itself. To disavow them is either wishful piety or an endorsement of the existing structure of dominance within the nation.

It is possible to cite many examples from the postcolonial world that suggest the presence of a dense and heterogeneous time. In those places, one could show industrial capitalists delaying the closing of a business deal because they hadn't yet heard from their respective astrologers, or industrial workers who would not touch a new machine until it had been consecrated with appropriate religious rites, or voters who would set fire to themselves to mourn the defeat of their favorite leader, or ministers who openly boast of having secured more jobs for people from their own clan and having kept the others out. To call this the co-presence of several times—the time of the modern and the times of the pre-modern—is only to endorse the utopianism of Western modernity. Much recent ethnographic work has established that these "other" times are not mere survivors from a premodern past: they are new products of the encounter with modernity itself. One must, therefore, call it the heterogeneous time of moder-

nity. And to push my polemical point a little further, I will add that the postcolonial world outside Western Europe and North America *actually constitutes most of the populated modern world.*

Let me discuss in some detail an example of the continuing tension between the utopian dimension of the homogeneous time of capital and the real space constituted by the heterogeneous time of governmentality and the effects produced by this tension on efforts to narrativize the nation.

II

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) was one of Columbia University's more remarkable students. Born into the untouchable Mahar community of Maharashtra in India, he fought against stupendous odds to seek higher education and qualify for a professional career. He got a Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University in 1917 and always remembered the influence on him of his professors John Dewey and Edwin Seligman.[5] He is famous in India as the foremost political leader in the twentieth century of the downtrodden Dalit peoples—the former untouchable castes. In this role, he has been both celebrated and vilified for having strenuously fought for the separate political representation of the Dalits, for preferential reservation or affirmative action in their favor in education and government employment, and for constructing their distinct cultural identity going as far as conversion to another religion—Buddhism. At the same time, Ambedkar is also famous as the principal architect of the Indian constitution, a staunch advocate of the interventionist modernizing state and of the legal protection of the modern virtues of equal citizenship and secularism. Seldom has been the tension between utopian homogeneity and real heterogeneity played out more dramatically than in the intellectual and political career of B. R. Ambedkar.

My focus here will be on certain moments in Ambedkar's life, in order to highlight the contradictions posed for a modern politics by the rival demands of universal citizenship on the one hand and the protection of particularist rights on the other. My burden will be to show that there is no available historical narrative of the nation that can resolve those contradictions.

Ambedkar was an unalloyed modernist. He believed in science, history, rationality, secularism, and above all in the modern state as the site for the actualization of human reason. But as an intellectual of the Dalit peoples, he could not but confront the question: what is the reason for the unique form of social inequality practiced within the so-called caste system of India? In two major works, *Who Were the Shudras* (1946) and *The Untouchables* (1948), Ambedkar looked for the specific historical origin of untouchability.[6] He concluded that untouchability did not go back to times immemorial; it had a definite history that could be scientifically established to be no longer than about 1500 years.

It is not necessary for us here to judge the plausibility of Ambedkar's theory. What is more interesting for our purposes is the narrative structure it suggests. He argued that there was, in the beginning, a state of equality between the Brahmins, the Shudras, and the untouchables. This equality, moreover, was not in some mythological state of nature but at a definite historical moment when all Indo-Aryan tribes were nomadic pastoralists. Then came the stage of settled agriculture and the reaction, in the form of Buddhism, to the sacrificial religion of the Vedic tribes. This was followed by the conflict between the Brahmins and the Buddhists, leading to the political defeat of Buddhism, the degradation of the Shudras, and the relegation of the beef-eating "broken men" into untouchability. The modern struggle for the abolition of caste was thus a quest for a return to that primary equality that was the original historical condition of the nation. The utopian search for homogeneity is thus made historical. It is, as we know, a familiar historicist narrative of modern nationalism.

To show how this narrative is disrupted by the heterogeneous time of colonial governmentality, let me turn to the fiction of nationalism.

III

One of the greatest modernist novels about Indian nationalism is *Dhorai charitmanas* (1949–51) by the Bengali writer Satinath Bhaduri (1906–1965).[7] The novel is deliberately constructed to fit the form of the *Ramcharitmanas*, the retelling in Hindi by the sixteenth-century

saint-poet Tulsidas (1532–1623) of the epic story of Rama, the mythical king who, through his exemplary life and conduct, is supposed to have created the most perfect kingdom on earth. Tulsidas's Ramayana is perhaps the most widely known literary work in the vast Hindi-speaking regions of India, providing an everyday language of moral discourse that cut across caste, class, and sectarian divides. It is also said to have been the most powerful vehicle for the generalization of Brahminical cultural values in northern India. The distinctness of Satinath Bhaduri's modernist retelling of the epic is that its hero, Dhorai, is from one of the backward castes.

Dhorai is a Tatma from northern Bihar (the district is Purnea, but Satinath gives it the fictional name Jirania). It is not an agriculturist group, specializing instead in the thatching of roofs and the digging of wells. When Dhorai was a child, his father died, and when his mother wanted to remarry, she left him in the charge of Bauka Bawa, the village holy man. Dhorai grew up going from door to door, accompanying the sadhu with his begging bowl, singing songs, mostly about the legendary king Rama and his perfect kingdom. The mental world of Dhorai is steeped in mythic time. He never goes to school but knows that those who can read the Ramayana are men of great merit and social authority. His elders—those around him—know of the government, of course, and know of the courts and the police, and some in the neighborhood who worked in the gardens and kitchens of the officials could even tell you when the district magistrate was displeased with the chairman of the district board or when the new kitchen maid was spending a little too much time in the evenings in the police officer's bungalow. But their general strategy of survival perfected over generations of experience, is to stay away from entanglements with government and its procedures. Once, following a feud, the residents of the neighboring hamlet of Dhangars set fire to Bauka Bawa's hut. The police come to investigate and Dhorai, the sole eyewitness, is asked to describe what he had seen. As he is about to speak, he notices Bauka Bawa's eyes. "Don't talk," the Bawa seems to say. "This is the police, they'll go away in an hour. The Dhangars are our neighbors, we'll have to live with them." Dhorai understands and tells

the police that he had seen nothing and did not know who had set fire to their house.

One day, Dhorai, along with others in the village, hear of Ganhi Bawa who, it was said, was a bigger holy man than their own Bauka Bawa or indeed any Bawa they had known, because he was almost as big as Lord Rama himself. Ganhi Bawa, they heard, ate neither meat nor fish, had never married and roamed around completely naked. Even the Bengali schoolmaster, the most learned man in the area, had become Ganhi Bawa's follower. Soon there is a sensation in the village when it is found that an image of Ganhi Bawa had appeared on a pumpkin. With great festivity, the miraculous pumpkin is installed in the village temple and offerings are made to the greatest holy man in the country. Ganhi Bawa, the Tatmas agreed, was a great soul indeed because even the Muslims promised to stop eating meat and onions, and the village shaman, whom no one had ever seen sober, vowed henceforth to drink only the lightest toddy and to stay away completely from opium. Some time later, a few villagers went all the way to the district town to see Ganhi Bawa himself, and came back with their enthusiasm somewhat deflated. The huge crowds had prevented them from seeing the great man from close but what they had seen was incongruous. Ganhi Bawa, they reported, like the fancy lawyers and teachers in town, wore spectacles! Who had ever seen a holy man wear spectacles? One or two even whispered if the man might not, after all, be a fake.

Satinath Bhaduri's intricately crafted account of Dhorai's upbringing among the Tatmas in the early decades of the twentieth century could be easily read as a faithful ethnography of colonial governance and the nationalist movement in northern India. We know, for instance, from Shahid Amin's studies how the authority of Mahatma Gandhi was constructed among India's peasantry through stories of his miraculous powers and rumors about the fate of his followers and detractors, or how the Congress program and the objectives of the movement were themselves transmitted in the countryside in the language of myth and popular religion.[8] If Gandhi and the movements he led in the 1920s and 1930s were a set of common events

that connected the lives of millions of people in both the cities and the villages of India, they did not constitute a common experience. Rather, even as they participated in what historians describe as the same great events, their own understandings of those events were narrated in very different languages and inhabited very different life-worlds. The nation, even if it was being constituted through such events, existed only in heterogeneous time.

Of course, it might be objected that the nation is indeed an abstraction, that it is, to use the phrase that Ben Anderson has made famous, only "an imagined community" and that, therefore, this ideal and empty construct, floating as it were in homogeneous time, can be given a varied content by diverse groups of people, all of whom, remaining different in their concrete locations, can nevertheless become elements in the unbound seriality of national citizens. Without doubt, this is the dream of all nationalists. Satinath Bhaduri, who was himself a leading functionary in the Congress organization in Purnea district, shared the dream. He was acutely aware of the narrowness and particularism of the everyday lives of his characters. They were yet to become national citizens, but he was hopeful of change. He saw that even the lowly Tatmas and Dhangars were stirring. His hero Dhorai leads the Tatmas into defying the local Brahmins and wearing the sacred thread themselves—in a process, occurring all over India at this time, that the sociologist M. N. Srinivas describes as Sanskritization, but which the historian David Hardiman has shown to be marked by a bitterly contested and often violent struggle over elite domination and subaltern resistance.[9] The intricate caste and communal grid of governmental classifications is never absent from Satinath's narrative. But in a deliberate allusion to the life-story of the legendary Prince Rama, Satinath throws his hero Dhorai into a cruel conspiracy hatched against him by his kinsmen. He suspects his wife of having a liaison with a Christian man from the Dhangar hamlet. He leaves the village, goes into exile and resumes his life in another village, among other communities. Dhorai is uprooted from the narrowness of his home and thrown into the world. The new metalled roadway, along which motorcars and trucks now whizz past ponderous bullock-carts, opens up his imagination. "Where does this road

begin? Where does it end? [Dhorai] doesn't know. Perhaps no one knows. Some of the carts are loaded with maize, others bring plaintiffs to the district court, still others carry patients to the hospital. In his mind, Dhorai sees shadows that suggest to him something of the vastness of the country."[10] The nation is coming into shape. Satinath sends off his hero into an epic journey toward the promised goal, not of kingdom because this is no longer the mythical age of Rama, but of citizenship.

IV

Ambedkar's dream of equal citizenship also had to contend with the fact of governmental classifications. As early as 1920, he had posed the problem of representation faced by untouchables in India: "The right of representation and the right to hold office under the state are the two most important rights that make up citizenship. But the untouchability of the untouchables puts these rights far beyond their reach. . . . they [the untouchables] can be represented by the untouchables alone." The general representation of all citizens would not serve the special requirements of the untouchables, because given the prejudices and entrenched practices among the dominant castes, there was no reason to expect that the latter would use the law to emancipate the untouchables. "A legislature composed of high caste men will not pass a law removing untouchability, sanctioning intermarriages, removing the ban on the use of public streets, public temples, public schools. . . . This is not because they cannot, but chiefly because they will not."[11]

But there were several ways in which the special needs of representation of the untouchables could be secured, and many of these had been tried out in colonial India. One was the protection by colonial officials of the interests of the lower castes against the politically dominant upper castes or the nomination by the colonial government of distinguished men from the untouchable groups to serve as their representatives. Another way was to reserve a certain number of seats in the legislature only for candidates from the lower castes. Yet another was to have separate electorates of lower-caste voters who could elect their own representatives. In the immensely complicated world

of late colonial constitutional politics in India, all of these methods, with innumerable variations, were debated and tried out. Besides, caste was not the only contentious issue of ethnic representation; the even more divisive issue of religious minorities became inextricably tied up with the politics of citizenship in late colonial India.

Ambedkar clearly ruled out one of these methods of special representation—protection by the colonial regime. In 1930, when the Congress declared independence or Swaraj as its political goal, Ambedkar declared at a conference of the depressed classes:

the bureaucratic form of Government in India should be replaced by a Government which will be a Government of the people, by the people and for the people. . . . We feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our own hands. No share of this political power can evidently come to us so long as the British government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power in our own hands, without which we cannot bring salvation to our people. . . . We know that political power is passing from the British into the hands of those who wield such tremendous economic, social and religious sway over our existence. We are willing that it may happen, though the idea of Swaraj recalls to the mind of many the tyrannies, oppressions and injustices practiced upon us in the past.[12]

The dilemma is clearly posed here. The colonial government, for all its homilies about the need to uplift those oppressed by the religious tyranny of traditional Hinduism, could only look after the untouchables as its subjects. It could never give them citizenship. Only under an independent national constitution was citizenship conceivable for the untouchables. Yet, if independence meant the rule of the upper castes, how could the untouchables expect equal citizenship and the end of the social tyranny from which they had suffered for centuries? Ambedkar's position was clear: the untouchables must support national independence, in the full knowledge that it would lead to the political dominance of the upper castes, but they must press

on with the struggle for equality within the framework of the new constitution.

In 1932, the method of achieving equal citizenship for the untouchables became the issue in a dramatic standoff between Ambedkar and Gandhi. In the course of negotiations between the British government and Indian political leaders on constitutional reforms, Ambedkar, representing the so-called depressed classes, had argued that they must be allowed to constitute a separate electorate and elect their own representatives to the central and provincial legislatures. The Congress, which had by this time conceded a similar demand for separate electorates for the Muslims, refused to accept that the untouchables were a community separate from the Hindus and was prepared instead to have reserved seats for them to be chosen by the general electorate. Ambedkar clarified that he would be prepared to accept this formula if there was any hope that the British would grant universal adult suffrage to all Indians. But since the suffrage was severely limited by property and education qualifications, the depressed castes, dispersed as a thin minority within the general population and, unlike the Muslim minority, lacking any significant territorial concentrations, were unlikely to have any influence at all over the elections. The only way to ensure that the legislature contained at least some who were the true representatives of the untouchables was to allow them to be elected by a separate electorate of the depressed classes.

Gandhi reacted fiercely to Ambedkar's suggestion that upper-caste Congress leaders could never properly represent the untouchables, calling it "the unkindest cut of all." Indulging in a rather unmahatma-like boast, he declared: "I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll." He insisted that unlike the question of the religious minorities, the issue of untouchability was a matter internal to Hinduism and had to be resolved within it.

I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly

tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political rights of Untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life.

True to his word, Gandhi threatened to go on a fast rather than concede the demand for separate electorates for the depressed classes. Put under enormous pressure, Ambedkar conceded and, after negotiations, signed with Gandhi what is known as the Poona Pact by which the Dalits were given a substantial number of reserved seats but within the Hindu electorate.[13] As it happened, this remained the basic form for the representation of the former untouchable castes in the constitution of independent India, but of course, by this time the country had been divided into two sovereign nation-states.

The problem of national homogeneity and minority citizenship was posed and temporarily resolved in India in the early 1930s. But the form of the resolution is instructive. It graphically illustrates that ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy as well as an apparatus of power which, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, "produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities, or 'cultural difference' that continually overlap in the act of writing the nation."[14] Ambedkar, as we have seen, had no quarrel with the idea of the homogeneous nation as a pedagogical category—the nation as progress, the nation in the process of becoming—except that he would have insisted with Gandhi and the other Congress leaders that it was not just the ignorant masses that needed training in proper citizenship but the upper-caste elite as well which had still not accepted that democratic equality was incompatible with caste inequality. But Ambedkar refused to join Gandhi in performing that homogeneity in constitutional negotiations over citizenship. The untouchables, he insisted, were a minority within the nation and needed special representation in the political body. On the other hand, Gandhi and the Congress, while asserting that the nation was one and indivisible, had already conceded that the Muslims were a minority

within the nation. The untouchables? They represented a problem internal to Hinduism. Imperceptibly, the homogeneity of India slides into the homogeneity of the Hindus. The removal of untouchability remains a pedagogical task, to be accomplished by social reform, if necessary by law, but caste inequality among the Hindus is not to be performed before the British rulers or the Muslim minority. Homogeneity breaks down on one plane, only to be reasserted on another. Heterogeneity, unstoppable at one point, is forcibly suppressed at another.

In the meantime, our fictional hero Dhorai continues, in the 1930s, to receive his education in nationalism. Loosened from his moorings, he drifts to another village and starts life afresh among the Koeri, a backward caste of sharecroppers and laborers. Dhorai begins to learn the realities of peasant life—of Rajput landlords and Koeri adhiars and Santal laborers, of growing paddy and jute and tobacco and maize, of moneylenders and traders. In January 1934, Bihar is ripped apart by the most violent earthquake in its recorded history. Government officers come to survey the damage; so do the nationalist volunteers from the Congress. For more than a year, the Koeris hear vaguely that they were going to be given "relief." And then they are told that the survey had found that the Koeri huts, being made of mud walls and thatched roofs, had been easily repaired by the Koeris themselves, but the brick houses of the Rajput landlords had suffered severe damage. The report had recommended, therefore, that the bulk of the relief should be given to the Rajputs.

Thus begins a new chapter in Dhorai's education—his discovery that the Bengali lawyers and Rajput landlords were fast becoming the principal followers of the Mahatma. But even as the old exploiters become the new messengers of national freedom, the mystique of the Mahatma remains untarnished. One day, a volunteer arrives in the village with letters from the Mahatma. He tells the Koeris that they in turn must send a letter each to the Mahatma. No, no, they don't have to pay for the postage stamp. All they have to do is walk up to the officer who would give them a letter which they must put in Mahatmaji's postbox—the white one, remember, not the colored ones. This was called the "vote." The volunteer instructs Dhorai:

"Your name is Dhorai Koeri, your father is Kirtu Koeri. Remember to say that to the officer. Your father is Kirtu Koeri." Dhorai does as he is told.

Inside the voting booth, Dhorai stood with folded hands in front of the white box and dropped the letter into it. Praise to Mahatmaji, praise to the Congress volunteer, they had given Dhorai the little role of the squirrel in the great task of building the kingdom of Rama. But his heart broke with sorrow—if only he could write, he would have written the letter himself to the Mahatma. Just imagine, all these people writing letters to the Mahatma, from one end of the country to the other, all together, at the same time. Tatmatuli, Jirania, . . . Dhorai, . . . the volunteer, . . . they all wanted the same thing. They had all sent the same letter to the Mahatma. The government, the officers, the police, the landlords, . . . all were against them. They belonged to many different castes, and yet they had come so close. . . . They were linked as though by a spider's web; the fibre was so thin that if you tried to grab it, it would break. Indeed, you couldn't always tell if it was there or not. When it swayed gently in the breeze, or the morning dewdrops clung to it, or when a sudden ray of the sun fell on it, you saw it, and even then only for a moment. This was the land of Ramji over which his avatar Mahatmaji was weaving his thin web. . . . "Hey, what are you doing inside the booth?" The officer's voice broke his reverie. Dhorai came out quickly.[15]

The vote is the great anonymous performance of citizenship, which is why it probably did not matter too much that Dhorai's introduction to this ritual was through an act of impersonation. But it only concealed the question of who represents whom within the nation. Although the Koeris voted faithfully for the Mahatma, they were dismayed to find that the Rajput landlord with whom they had fought for years was elected chairman of the district board with support from the Congress. Mahatmaji's men, they heard, were now ministers in the government, but when a new road was built, sure enough, it went right next to the Rajput houses.

But Dhorai bought himself a copy of the Ramayana. One day, he promised himself, he would learn to read it. The passage to the kingdom of Rama, however, was suddenly disrupted when news arrived that the Mahatma had been arrested by the British. This was the final struggle, the Mahatma had announced. Every true follower of Mahatmaji must now join his army. Yes, the army; they must act against the tyrants, not wait to be arrested. Dhorai is mobilized into the Quit India movement of 1942. This was a war unlike any other; it was, the volunteers said, a revolution. Together, they stormed the police station, setting fire to it. By the morning, the district magistrate, the police superintendent, and all senior officers had fled. Victory to Mahatmaji, victory to the revolution! The district had won independence; they were free.

It didn't last long. Weeks later, the troops moved in, with trucks and guns. Along with the volunteers, Dhorai left for the forests. He was now a wanted man, a rebel. But they were all wanted men—they were Mahatmaji's soldiers. There was a strange equality among them in the forest. They had dropped their original names and called each other Gandhi, Jawahar, Patel, Azad—they were so many anonymous replicas of the representatives of the nation. Except they had been driven away from its everyday life. Sometime later, word came that the British had won the war with the Germans and the Japanese, the Congress leaders were about to be released and all revolutionaries must surrender. Surrender? And be tried and jailed? Who knows, maybe even hanged? Dhorai's unit resolves not to surrender.

V

On the national stage, the Muslim League resolved in March 1940 that any constitutional plan for devolution of power in India must include an arrangement by which geographically contiguous areas with Muslim majorities could be grouped into independent states, autonomous and sovereign. This became known as the Pakistan resolution. The Congress opposed the plan. A few months later, in December 1940, Ambedkar wrote a long book entitled *Pakistan or Partition of India* in which he discussed in detail the pros and cons of the proposal.[16]

It is a book that is, surprisingly, seldom mentioned, even today when there is such a great Ambedkar revival.[17] In addition to showing his superb skills as a political analyst and a truly astonishing prescience, I think it is a text in which Ambedkar grappled most productively with the twofold demand on his politics—one, to further the struggle for universal and equal citizenship within the nation, and two, to secure special representation for the depressed castes in the body politic.

The book is almost Socratic in its dialogical structure, presenting first, in the strongest possible terms, the Muslim case for Pakistan, and then the Hindu case against Pakistan, and then considering the alternatives available to the Muslims and the Hindus if there were no partition. What is striking is the way in which Ambedkar, as the unstated representative of the untouchables, adopts a position of perfect neutrality in the debate, with no stake at all in how the matter is resolved—he belongs neither to the Muslim nor to the Hindu side. All he is concerned with is to judge the rival arguments and recommend what seems to him the most realistic solution. But, of course, this is only a narrative strategy. We know that Ambedkar did have a great stake in the question: the most important issue for him was whether or not partition would be better for the untouchables of India. The significance of *Pakistan or Partition of India* is that Ambedkar is here judging the utopian claims of nationhood in the concrete terms of realist politics.

After dissecting the arguments of both sides, Ambedkar comes to the conclusion that, on balance, partition would be better for both Muslims and Hindus. The clinching arguments come when he considers the alternative to partition: how was a united and independent India, free from British rule, likely to be governed? Given the hostility of Muslims to the idea of a single central government, inevitably dominated by the Hindu majority, it was certain that if there were no partition, India would have to live with a weak central government, with most powers devolved to the provinces. It would be "an anaemic and sickly state." The animosities and mutual suspicions would remain: "burying Pakistan is not the same thing as burying the ghost of Pakistan."[18] Moreover, there was the question of the armed forces

of independent India. In a long chapter, Ambedkar goes straight to the heart of colonial governance and discusses the communal composition of the British Indian army, a subject on which there was a virtual conspiracy of silence. He points out that almost sixty percent of the Indian army consisted of men from the Punjab, the North-West Frontier and Kashmir, and of them more than half were Muslims. Would a weak central government, regarded with suspicion by the Muslim population, command the loyalty of these troops? On the other hand, should the new government attempt to change the communal composition of the army, would that be accepted without protest by the Muslims of the north-west?[19]

Judged positively, the new state of Pakistan would be a homogeneous state. The boundaries of Punjab and Bengal could be redrawn to form relatively homogeneous Muslim and Hindu regions to be integrated with Pakistan and India, respectively. Long before anyone had demanded the partition of the two provinces, Ambedkar foresaw that the Hindus and Sikhs would not agree to live in a country specifically created for Muslims and would want to join India. For the North-West Frontier Province and Sind, where the Hindu population was thinly distributed, the only realistic solution was an officially supervised transfer of population, as had happened in Turkey, Greece, and Bulgaria. The India or Hindustan that would be created would be composite, not homogeneous. But the minority question could then be handled more reasonably. "To me, it seems that if Pakistan does not solve the communal problem within Hindustan, it substantially reduces its proportion and makes it of minor significance and much easier of peaceful solution."[20]

And then, in a string of brilliant moves of real-political logic Ambedkar shows that only in united India, in which more than a third of the population is Muslim, could Hindu dominance be a serious threat. In such a state, the Muslims, fearing the tyranny of the majority, would organize themselves into a Muslim party such as the Muslim League, provoking in turn the rise of Hindu parties calling for Hindu Raj. Following partition, on the other hand, the Muslims in Hindustan would be a small and widely scattered minority. They would inevitably join this or that political party, pursuing different

social and economic programs. Similarly, there would be little ground left for a party like the Hindu Mahasabha, which would wither away. And as for the lower orders of Hindu society, they would make common cause with the Muslim minority to fight the Hindu high castes for their rights of citizenship and social dignity.[21]

We need not spend time trying to assess the intrinsic merits of Ambedkar's arguments for and against the partition of India, although in the discursive context of the early 1940s they are remarkably perspicacious. I am emphasizing here the ground on which he lays his arguments. He is fully aware of the value of universal and equal citizenship and wholly endorses the ethical significance of unbound serialities. On the other hand, he realizes that the slogan of universality is often a mask to cover the perpetuation of real inequalities. The politics of democratic nationhood offers a means for achieving a more substantive equality, but only by ensuring adequate representation for the underprivileged groups within the body politic. A strategic politics of groups, classes, communities, ethnicities—bound serialities of all sorts—is thus inevitable. Homogeneity is not thereby forsaken; on the contrary, in specific contexts, it can often supply the clue to a strategic solution, such as partition, to a problem of intractable heterogeneity. On the other hand, unlike the utopian claims of universalist nationalism, the politics of heterogeneity can never claim to yield a general formula for all peoples at all times: its solutions are always strategic, contextual, historically specific and, inevitably, provisional.

Let me then finally return to Anderson's distinction between nationalism and the politics of ethnicity. He agrees that the "bound serialities" of governmentality can create a sense of community, which is precisely what the politics of ethnic identity feeds on. But this sense of community, Anderson thinks, is illusory. In these real and imagined censuses, "thanks to capitalism, state machineries and mathematics, integral bodies become identical, and thus serially aggregable as phantom communities."[22] By contrast, the "unbound serialities" of nationalism do not, one presumes, need to turn the free individual members of the national community into integers. It can imagine the nation as having existed in identical form from the dawn of historical time to the present without requiring a census-like verification of its

identity. It can also experience the simultaneity of the imagined collective life of the nation without imposing rigid and arbitrary criteria of membership. Can such "unbound serialities" exist anywhere except in utopian space?

To endorse these "unbound serialities" while rejecting the "bound" ones is, in fact, to imagine nationalism without modern governmentality. What modern politics can we have that has no truck with capitalism, state machineries, or mathematics? The historical moment that Anderson, and many others, seem keen to preserve is the mythical moment when classical nationalism merges with modernity. I believe it is no longer productive to reassert the utopian politics of classical nationalism. Or rather, I do not believe it is an option that is available for a theorist from the postcolonial world. Such a theorist must chart a course that steers away from global cosmopolitanism on the one hand and ethnic chauvinism on the other. It means necessarily to dirty one's hands in the complicated business of the politics of governmentality. The asymmetries produced and legitimized by the universalisms of modern nationalism have not left room for any ethically neat choice here. For the postcolonial theorist, like the postcolonial novelist, is born only when the mythical timespace of epic modernity has been lost forever.

Let me end by describing the fate of our fictional hero Dhorai. Living in the forests with his band of fugitive rebels, Dhorai is brought face to face with the limits to his dreams of equality and freedom. It is not the bound serialities of caste and community that prove illusory, but rather the promise of equal citizenship. The harshness of fugitive life scrapes the veneer off the shell of comradeship and the old hierarchies reappear. Suspicion, intrigue, revenge and recrimination become the ruling sentiments. Dhorai's copy of the Ramayana lies tied up in his bundle, unopened, unread. In the middle of all this, a young boy joins the band. He is a Christian Dhangar, he says, from the hamlet next to Tatmatuli. Dhorai feels a strange bond with the boy. Might he be, he imagines, the son he has never seen? Dhorai looks after the boy and asks him many questions. The more he talks to him, the more he is convinced that this indeed is his son. The boy falls ill, and Dhorai decides to take him to his mother. As he approaches

Tatmatuli, he can hardly control his excitement. Was this going to be the epic dénouement of the latter-day untouchable Rama? Was he going to be united with his banished wife and son? The mother appears, takes her son in, comes out again and invites the kind stranger to sit down. She talks about her son, about her dead husband. Dhorai listens to her. She is someone else, not his wife. The boy is someone else, not his son. Dhorai makes polite conversation for a few minutes and then goes, we don't know where. But he leaves behind his bundle, along with the copy of the Ramayana for which he has no further need. Dhorai has lost forever his promised place in prophetic time.

Or has he? Following independence, B. R. Ambedkar became chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution and later the minister of law. In these capacities, he was instrumental in putting together one of the most progressive democratic constitutions in the world, guaranteeing the fundamental rights of freedom and equality irrespective of religion or caste and at the same providing for special representation in the legislatures for the formerly untouchable castes.[23] But changing the law was one thing; changing social practices was another matter. Frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the state in putting an end to caste discrimination in Hindu society, Ambedkar decided in 1956 to convert to Buddhism. It was an act of separatism, to be sure, but at the same time, it was also, as Ambedkar pointed out, affiliating with a religion that was far more universalist than Hinduism in its endorsement of social equality.[24] Ambedkar died only a few weeks after his conversion, only to be reborn some twenty years later as the prophet of Dalit liberation. That is his status today—a source of both realist wisdom and emancipatory dreams for India's oppressed castes.

To close my story about the unresolved conflict between universal affiliations and particular identities at the founding moment of democratic nationhood in India, let me point out what is at stake here today. At a meeting in 2000 in an Indian research institute, after a distinguished panel of academics and policymakers had bemoaned the decline of universalist ideals and moral values in national life, a Dalit activist from the audience asked why it was the case that liberal and leftist intellectuals were so pessimistic about where history was moving at the turn of the millennium. As far as he could see, the latter half of the twentieth century had been the brightest period in the entire history of the Dalits, since they had got rid of the worst forms of untouchability, mobilized themselves politically as a community, and were now making strategic alliances with other oppressed groups in order to get a share of governmental power. All this could happen because the conditions of mass democracy had thrown open the bastions of caste privilege to attack from the representatives of oppressed groups organized into electoral majorities. The panelists were silenced by this impassioned intervention. I came away persuaded once more that it is morally illegitimate to uphold the universalist ideals of nationalism without simultaneously demanding that the politics spawned by governmentality be recognized as an equally legitimate part of the real time-space of the modern political life of the nation. Without it, governmental technologies will continue to proliferate and serve, much as they did in the colonial era, as manipulable instruments of class rule in a global capitalist order. By seeking to find real ethical spaces for their operation in heterogeneous time, the incipient resistances to that order may succeed in inventing new terms of political justice.

## Populations and Political Society

I

The classic moment when the promises of enlightened modernity appeared to come together with the universal political aspirations of citizenship within the nation was, of course, the French Revolution. The moment has been celebrated and canonized in numerous ways in the last two hundred years, perhaps most succinctly in the formula, now almost universally acknowledged, of the identity of the people with the nation and, in turn, the identity of the nation with the state. There is no question that the legitimacy of the modern state is now clearly and firmly grounded in a concept of popular sovereignty. This is, of course, the basis of modern democratic politics, but the idea of popular sovereignty has an influence that is more universal than that of democracy. Even the most undemocratic of modern regimes must claim its legitimacy not from divine right or dynastic succession or the right of conquest but from the will of the people, however expressed. Autocrats, military dictatorships, one-party regimes—all rule, or so they must say, on behalf of the people.

The power of the idea of popular sovereignty and its influence on democratic and national movements in Europe and the Americas in the nineteenth century is well known. But the influence extended far wider than what is now known as the modern West. The consequences of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 have been much discussed.[1] Further east, the prince Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, then locked in ferocious struggle with the English in southern India, opened negotiations with the revolutionary government in France in 1797, of-

fering a treaty of alliance and friendship "founded on Republican principles of sincerity and good faith, to the end that you and your nation and myself and my people may become one family." It is said that the prince was thrilled when he received a reply in which he was addressed as "*Citoyen* Sultan Tipu."[2]

It is, of course, more than likely that Tipu's republican sympathies went no deeper than his invocation, in his letter to "the gentlemen of the Directory," of the tactical principle "that your enemies may be mine and those of my people; and that my enemies may be considered as yours." But no such reservations apply to the sentiments held by the new generation of modernist reformers in nineteenth-century India. At school in Calcutta, we read of the historic voyage to England in 1830 of Rammohun Roy, hailed as the father of Indian modernity. When his boat stopped at Marseilles, we were told, Rammohun was so eager to salute the tricolor, restored to its rightful place by the July monarchy, that in hurrying down the gangway, he fell and broke his leg. I discovered later from more reliable biographies that his injury had occurred earlier, in Cape Town, but the infirmity could not dampen his enthusiasm for liberty, equality, and fraternity. A fellow passenger, I found out, wrote as follows: "Two French frigates, under the revolutionary flag, the glorious tri-colour, were lying in Table Bay; and lame as he was, he would insist on visiting them. The sight of these colours seemed to kindle the flame of his enthusiasm, and to render him insensible to pain." Rammohun was taken around the vessels and he told his hosts "how much he was delighted to be under the banner that waved over their decks—an evidence of the glorious triumph of right over might; and as he left the vessels he repeated emphatically 'Glory, glory, glory to France!' "[3]

On the other side of the globe, in the Caribbean, however, other colonial people had in the meantime found out that there were limits to the promise of universal citizenship, and they suffered more than just a broken leg. The leaders of the Haitian revolution took seriously the message of liberty and equality they heard from Paris and rose up to declare the end of slavery. To their dismay, they were told by the revolutionary government in France that the rights of man and citizen did not extend to Negroes, even though they had declared themselves

free, because they were not, or not yet, citizens.[4] The great Mirabeau asked the National Assembly to remind the colonists that "in proportioning the number of deputies to the population of France, we have taken into consideration neither the number of our horses nor that of our mules."[5] In the end, after the Haitian revolutionaries declared their independence from colonial rule, the French sent an expeditionary force in 1802 to Saint-Domingue to reestablish colonial control as well as slavery. The historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot has said that the Haitian revolution occurred before its time. The entire spectrum of Western discourse in the age of Enlightenment had no place for black slaves claiming self-government by taking up arms: the idea was simply unthinkable.[6]

Thus, while creole nationalisms succeeded in proclaiming independent republics in Spanish America in the early nineteenth century, this was denied to the black Jacobins of Saint-Domingue. The world would have to wait for a century and a half before the rights of man and citizen would be allowed to extend that far. By then, however, with the success of democratic and national struggles all over the world, the constraints of class, rank, gender, race, caste, etc. would be gradually lifted from the idea of popular sovereignty, and universal citizenship would be recognized, as it now is, in the general right of self-determination of nations. Along with the modern state, the concept of the people and a discourse of rights have now become generalized within the idea of the nation. But a gulf has also been produced between the advanced democratic nations of the West and the rest of the world.

The modern form of the nation is both universal and particular. The universal dimension is represented, first, by the idea of the people as the original locus of sovereignty in the modern state, and second, by the idea of all humans as bearers of rights. If this was universally true, how was it to be realized? By enshrining the specific rights of *citizens* in a state constituted by a particular people, namely, a *nation*. Thus, the nation-state became the particular, and normal, form of the modern state. The basic framework of rights in the modern state was defined by the twin ideas of freedom and equality. But freedom and equality frequently pulled in opposite directions. The two, there-

fore, had to be mediated, as Étienne Balibar has usefully pointed out, by two further concepts: those of property and community.[7] *Property* sought to resolve the contradictions between freedom and equality at the level of the individual in relation to other individuals. *Community* was where the contradictions were sought to be resolved at the level of the whole fraternity. Along the dimension of property, the particular resolutions might be more or less liberal; along the dimension of community, they might be more or less communitarian. But it was within the specific form of the sovereign and homogeneous nation-state that the universal ideals of modern citizenship were expected to be realized.

Using theoretical shorthand, we could say that property and community defined the conceptual parameters within which the political discourse of capital, proclaiming liberty and equality, could flourish. The ideas of freedom and equality that gave shape to the universal rights of the citizen were crucial not only for the fight against absolutist political regimes but also for undermining pre-capitalist practices that restricted individual mobility and choice to traditional confines defined by birth and status. But they were also crucial, as the young Karl Marx noted, in separating the abstract domain of Right from the actual domain of life in civil society.[8] In legal-political theory, the rights of the citizen were unrestricted by race, religion, ethnicity, or class (by the early twentieth century, the same rights would also be made available to women), but this did not mean the abolition of actual distinctions between men (and women) in civil society. Rather, the universalism of the theory of rights both presupposed and enabled a new ordering of power relations in society based precisely on those distinctions of class, race, religion, gender, etc. At the same time, the emancipatory promise held out by the idea of universal equal rights also acted as a constant source of theoretical critique of actual civil society. That promise has, in the last two centuries, propelled numerous struggles all over the world to change unequal and unjust social differences of race, religion, caste, class, or gender.

Marxists have, in general, believed that the sway of capital over traditional community was the inevitable sign of historical progress. True, there is a deep sense of ambiguity in this judgment. If com-

munity was the social form of the unity of labor with the means of labor, then the destruction of that unity caused by the so-called primitive accumulation of capital produced a new laborer who was free not just to sell his labor as a commodity but free from all encumbrances of property except his labor-power. Marx wrote with bitter irony about this "double freedom" of the wage-laborer freed from the ties of pre-capitalist community.[9] But in 1853, he wrote of British rule in India as accomplishing a necessary social revolution: "whatever may have been the crimes of England," he wrote, "she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution in India."[10] Late in his life, we know, he became far more skeptical of the revolutionary effects of colonial rule in agrarian societies like India and even speculated on the possibility of the Russian peasant community moving directly to a socialist form of collective life without going through the destructive phase of a capitalist transition.[11] Despite the lingering skepticism and irony, however, Marxists of the twentieth century generally welcomed the undermining of pre-capitalist property and the creation of large homogeneous political units such as nation-states. Where capital was seen to be performing the historical task of transition to more developed and modern forms of social production, it received the considered, albeit grudging and ambivalent, approval of Marxist historical theory.

When talking of equality, freedom, property and community in relation to the modern state, we are indeed talking of the political history of capital. The recent debate in Anglo-American political philosophy between liberals and communitarians seems to me to have confirmed the crucial role in this political history of the two mediating concepts of property and community in determining the range of institutional possibilities within the field constituted by freedom and equality. The communitarians could not reject the value of personal freedom, for if they overemphasized the claims of communal identity, they were open to the charge of denying the basic individual right to choose, possess, use and exchange commodities at will. On the other hand, liberals too did not deny that identifying with the community might be an important source of moral meaning for individual lives. Their concern was that by undermining the liberal sys-

tem of rights and the liberal policy of neutrality on questions of the common good, communitarians were opening the door to majoritarian intolerance, the perpetuation of conservative practices, and a potentially tyrannical insistence on conformism. Few denied the empirical fact that most individuals, even in industrially advanced liberal democracies, led their lives within an inherited network of social attachments that could be described as community. But there was a strong feeling that not all communities were worthy of approval in modern political life. In particular, attachments that seemed to emphasize the inherited, the primordial, the parochial, or the traditional were regarded by most theorists as smacking of conservative and intolerant practices and hence as inimical to the values of modern citizenship. The political community that seemed to find the largest measure of approval was the modern nation that grants equality and freedom to all citizens irrespective of biological or cultural difference.[12]

This zone of legitimate political discourse, defined by the parameters of property and community, is emphasized even further by the new philosophical doctrine that calls itself republicanism and that claims to supersede the liberal-communitarian debate. Following upon the historical researches of John Pocock, this doctrine has been advanced most eloquently by Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit.[13] Instead of the usual liberal understanding of freedom as negative liberty, i.e. the individual's freedom from interference, the aim of republicanism is to invoke the moment of anti-absolutism and claim that freedom is freedom from domination. This goal would urge the lover of freedom to fight, unlike what liberals would advocate, against all forms of domination, even when they are benign and do not normally involve interference. It would also allow the lover of freedom to support forms of interference that do not amount to domination. Thus, the republican would be in favor of governmental measures to ensure greater equality or to pursue the moral values of community as long as they do not imply an arbitrary power of domination. In this way, the theorists of republicanism argue, both the unattractiveness of a narrowly limited regime of liberal noninterference and the

dangers of rampant communitarian populism can be avoided. The structures of property would not be threatened, while community in its sanitized and palatable forms could flourish.

I do not here wish to enter into the question of whether the republican claim actually leads to conclusions that are substantively different from those of the liberal theory of government. Instead, I would like to turn our attention to the institutional presuppositions that the doctrine of republicanism shares with that of liberalism. Whether individualist or communitarian or republican, all agree that their desired political institutions cannot be made to work effectively merely by legislating them into existence. They must, as Philip Pettit puts it rather cutely, "win a place in the habits of people's hearts."[14] They must, in other words, be nested in a network of norms in civil society that prevail independently of the state and that are consistent with its laws. Only such a civil society would provide, to use an old phraseology, the social base for capitalist democracy.

This was the grand theme of virtually all sociological theory in Europe in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, when the problem was posed of the possibility of capitalist transition in the non-Western world, the same presupposition provided the foundation for modernization theory, whether in its Marxian or Weberian version. The argument, to put it simply, was that without a transformation of the institutions and practices of civil society, whether carried out from the top or from below, it was impossible to create or sustain freedom and equality in the political domain. To have modern and free political communities, one must first have people who were citizens, not subjects. While no one would use any more the stark similes of eighteenth-century liberals, it was understood that horses and mules would not be able to represent themselves in government. For many, this understanding provided the ethical core of a project of modernization of the non-Western world: to transform erstwhile subjects, unfamiliar with the possibilities of equality and freedom, into modern citizens. In the previous chapter I described the dreams and frustrations of one such modernizer, B. R. Ambedkar.

II

However, while philosophical discussions on the rights of citizens in the modern state hovered around the concepts of liberty and community, the emergence of mass democracies in the advanced industrial countries of the West in the twentieth century produced an entirely new distinction—one between citizens and populations. Citizens inhabit the domain of theory, populations the domain of policy. Unlike the concept of citizen, the concept of population is wholly descriptive and empirical; it does not carry a normative burden. Populations are identifiable, classifiable, and describable by empirical or behavioral criteria and are amenable to statistical techniques such as censuses and sample surveys. Unlike the concept of citizen, which carries the ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state, the concept of population makes available to government functionaries a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of their "policies"—economic policy, administrative policy, law, and even political mobilization. Indeed, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, a major characteristic of the contemporary regime of power is a certain "governmentalization of the state."[15] This regime secures legitimacy not by the participation of citizens in matters of state but by claiming to provide for the well-being of the population. Its mode of reasoning is not deliberative openness but rather an instrumental notion of costs and benefits. Its apparatus is not the republican assembly but an elaborate network of surveillance through which information is collected on every aspect of the life of the population that is to be looked after.

It is not surprising that in the course of the twentieth century, ideas of participatory citizenship that were so much a part of the Enlightenment notion of politics have fast retreated before the triumphant advance of governmental technologies that have promised to deliver more well-being to more people at less cost. Indeed, one might say that the actual political history of capital has long spilled over the normative confines of liberal political theory to go out and conquer the world through its governmental technologies. Much of the emotional charge of the communitarian or republican critique of

contemporary Western political life seems to flow from an awareness that the business of government has been emptied of all serious engagement with politics. This is shown most obviously in the steady fall in electoral participation in all Western democracies and even in the recent panic in left-liberal circles in Europe at the unexpected electoral success of right-wing populists.

How did the enumeration and classification of population groups for the purposes of welfare administration have this effect on the process of democratic politics in advanced capitalist countries? Many writers working in vastly diverse fields have thrown light on this question in recent years, from the philosopher Ian Hacking to the literary historian Mary Poovey.[16] Most relevant for us is the account given by British sociologists such as Nikolas Rose, Peter Miller, or Thomas Osborne of the actual working of governmentality in Britain and the United States.[17] They have surveyed the emergence of what has been called "government from the social point of view," typically in the areas of work, education, and health, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There was, for instance, the rise of social insurance systems to minimize the uncertain impact of the economy on various groups and individuals. There was the constitution of the family itself, the subject of numerous pedagogical, medical, economic, and ethical discourses, as a site of governmentality. There was a proliferation of censuses and demographic surveys, making the work of governmentality accountable in terms of numbers, and leading in turn to the idea of representation by numerical proportions. The management of migration, crime, war and disease made personal identity itself an issue of security and therefore subject to record and constant verification. (The issue has suddenly loomed large in the United States and Britain in the wake of the recent panic over terrorism, and yet both countries have had for decades a plethora of agencies, both state and non-state, recording, verifying and validating the biological, social, and cultural details of personal identity.) All of this made governance less a matter of politics and more of administrative policy, a business for experts rather than for political representatives. Moreover, while the political fraternity of citizens had to be constantly affirmed as one and indivisible, there was no one entity of the governed. There was

always a multiplicity of population groups that were the objects of governmentality—multiple targets with multiple characteristics, requiring multiple techniques of administration.

In short, the classical idea of popular sovereignty, expressed in the legal-political facts of equal citizenship, produced the homogeneous construct of the nation, whereas the activities of governmentality required multiple, cross-cutting and shifting classifications of the population as the targets of multiple policies, producing a necessarily heterogeneous construct of the social. Here, then, we have the antinomy between the lofty political imaginary of popular sovereignty and the mundane administrative reality of governmentality: it is the antinomy between the homogeneous national and the heterogeneous social. I might note in passing that when T. H. Marshall made his classic summation in 1949 of the story of the expansion of citizenship from civic to political to social rights, he was guilty of what we can now see was a category confusion. Applauding the progress of the welfare state in Britain, Marshall thought he was seeing the onward march of popular sovereignty and equal citizenship. In fact, it was an unprecedented proliferation of governmentality leading to the emergence of an intricately heterogeneous social.[18]

But in the chronological plotting of his story, Marshall was not wrong. The story of citizenship in the modern West moves from the institution of civic rights in civil society to political rights in the fully developed nation-state. Only then does one enter the relatively recent phase where "government from the social point of view" seems to take over. In countries of Asia and Africa, however, the chronological sequence is quite different. There the career of the modern state has been foreshortened. Technologies of governmentality often predate the nation-state, especially where there has been a relatively long experience of European colonial rule. In South Asia, for instance, the classification, description and enumeration of population groups as the objects of policy relating to land settlement, revenue, recruitment to the army, crime prevention, public health, management of famines and droughts, regulation of religious places, public morality, education, and a host of other governmental functions has a history of at

least a century and a half before the independent nation-states of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon were born. The colonial state was what Nicholas Dirks has called an "ethnographic state."[19] Populations there had the status of subjects, not citizens. Obviously, colonial rule did not recognize popular sovereignty.

That was a concept that fired the imaginations of nationalist revolutionaries. Ideas of republican citizenship often accompanied the politics of national liberation. But without exception—and this is crucial for our story about politics in most of the world—they were overtaken by the developmental state which promised to end poverty and backwardness by adopting appropriate policies of economic growth and social reform. With varying degrees of success, and in some cases with disastrous failure, the postcolonial states deployed the latest governmental technologies to promote the well-being of their populations, often prompted and aided by international and nongovernmental organizations. In adopting these technical strategies of modernization and development, older ethnographic concepts often entered the field of knowledge about populations—as convenient descriptive categories for classifying groups of people into suitable targets for administrative, legal, economic, or electoral policy. In many cases, classificatory criteria used by colonial governmental regimes continued into the postcolonial era, shaping the forms of both political demands and developmental policy. Thus, caste and religion in India, ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, and tribes in Africa remained the dominant criteria for identifying communities among the populations as objects of policy. So much so that a huge ethnographic survey, recently undertaken by a governmental agency in India and published in 43 volumes, has actually claimed to have identified and described a total of exactly 4,635 communities that are supposed to constitute the population of India.[20]

We have therefore described two sets of conceptual connections. One is the line connecting civil society to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty and granting equal rights to citizens. The other is the line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare. The first line points

to a domain of politics described in great detail in democratic political theory in the last two centuries. Does the second line point to a different domain of politics? I believe it does. To distinguish it from the classic associational forms of civil society, I am calling it *political society*.

In a series of recent papers, I have attempted to sketch out this conceptual field in the context of democratic politics in India.[21] I have favored retaining the old idea of civil society as bourgeois society, in the sense used by Hegel and Marx, and of using it in the Indian context as an actually existing arena of institutions and practices inhabited by a relatively small section of the people whose social locations can be identified with a fair degree of clarity. In terms of the *formal* structure of the state as given by the constitution and the laws, all of society is civil society; everyone is a citizen with equal rights and therefore to be regarded as a member of civil society. The political process is one where the organs of the state interact with members of civil society in their individual capacities or as members of associations.

This is, however, not how things work. Most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then 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. But it is not as though they are outside the reach of the state or even excluded from the domain of politics. As populations within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, they have to be both looked after and controlled by various governmental agencies. These activities bring these populations into a certain *political* relationship with the state. But this relationship does not always conform to what is envisaged in the constitutional depiction of the relation between the state and members of civil society. Yet these are without doubt political relations that may have acquired, in specific historically defined contexts, a widely recognized systematic character, and perhaps even certain conventionally recognized ethical norms, even if subject to varying degrees of contestation. How are we to begin to understand these processes?

Faced with similar problems, some analysts have favored expanding the idea of civil society to include virtually all existing social institutions that lie outside the strict domain of the state.[22] This practice has become rampant in the recent rhetoric of international financial institutions, aid agencies and nongovernmental organizations among whom the spread of a neoliberal ideology has authorized the consecration of every non-state organization as the precious flower of the associative endeavors of free members of civil society. I have preferred to resist these unscrupulously charitable theoretical gestures, principally because I feel it important not to lose sight of the vital and continually active project that still informs many of the state institutions in countries like India to transform traditional social authorities and practices into the modular forms of bourgeois civil society. Civil society as an *ideal* continues to energize an interventionist political project, but as an *actually existing form* it is demographically limited. Both of these facts must be borne in mind when considering the relation between modernity and democracy in countries such as India.

Some of you may recall a framework used in the early phase of the Subaltern Studies project in which we talked about a split in the domain of politics between an organized elite domain and an unorganized subaltern domain.[23] The idea of the split, of course, was intended to mark a fault line in the arena of nationalist politics in the three decades before independence during which the Indian masses, especially the peasantry, were drawn into organized political movements and yet remained distanced from the evolving forms of the postcolonial state. To say that there was a split in the domain of politics was to reject the notion, common to both liberal and Marxist historiographies, that the peasantry lived in some "pre-political" stage of collective action. It was to say that peasants in their collective actions were also being political, except that they were political in a way different from that of the elite. Since those early experiences of the imbrication of elite and subaltern politics in the context of the anticolonial movements, the democratic process in India has come a long way in bringing under its influence the lives of the subaltern classes. It is to understand these relatively recent forms of the entanglement

of elite and subaltern politics that I am proposing the notion of a *political society*.

In illustrating what I mean by political society and how it works, I will describe in the next chapter several cases studied in recent field work where we can see a politics emerging out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups. Many of these groups, organized into associations, transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work. They may live in illegal squatter settlements, make illegal use of water or electricity, travel without tickets in public transport. In dealing with them, the authorities cannot treat them on the same footing as other civic associations following more legitimate social pursuits. Yet state agencies and nongovernmental organizations cannot ignore them either, since they are among thousands of similar associations representing groups of population whose very livelihood or habitation involve violation of the law. These agencies therefore deal with these associations not as bodies of citizens but as convenient instruments for the administration of welfare to marginal and underprivileged population groups.

These groups on their part accept that their activities are often illegal and contrary to good civic behavior, but they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right. They profess a readiness to move out if they are given suitable alternative sites for resettlement, for instance. The state agencies recognize that these population groups do have some claim on the welfare programs of the government, but those claims could not be regarded as justiciable rights since the state did not have the means to deliver those benefits to the entire population of the country. To treat those claims as rights would only invite further violation of public property and civic laws.

What happens then is a negotiation of these claims on a political terrain where, on the one hand, governmental agencies have a public obligation to look after the poor and the underprivileged and, on the other, particular population groups receive attention from those agencies according to calculations of political expediency. Groups in political society have to pick their way through this uncertain terrain by making a large array of connections outside the group—with other groups in similar situations, with more privileged and influential

groups, with government functionaries, perhaps with political parties and leaders. They often make instrumental use of the fact that they can vote in elections, so that it is true to say that the field of citizenship, at certain points, overlaps with that of governmentality. But the instrumental use of the vote is possible only within a field of strategic politics. This is the stuff of democratic politics as it takes place on the ground in India. It involves what appears to be a constantly shifting compromise between the normative values of modernity and the moral assertion of popular demands.

Civil society then, restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens, represents in countries like India the high ground of modernity. So does the constitutional model of the state. But in actual practice, governmental agencies must descend from that high ground to the terrain of political society in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well-being and there to confront whatever is the current configuration of politically mobilized demands. In the process, one is liable to hear complaints from the protagonists of civil society and the constitutional state that modernity is facing an unexpected rival in the form of democracy.

I now turn to the very different, and often contradictory, political significance of civil society and political society. Let me do this by giving you one more story from the domain of popular politics in the Indian city.[24]

### III

On May 5, 1993, in the early hours of dawn, a man died in a Calcutta hospital. He had been admitted a few days before and was being treated for diabetes, renal failure and cerebro-vascular accident. His condition had deteriorated rapidly in the previous twenty-four hours and, although the doctors attending him struggled through the night, their efforts were in vain. A senior doctor of the hospital signed the death certificate.

The name of the man who died was Birendra Chakrabarti, but he was better known as Balak Brahmachari, leader of the Santan Dal, a religious sect with a large following in the southern and central districts of West Bengal. The sect itself is no more than fifty years old,

although it probably has its antecedents in earlier sectarian movements among the lower-caste, especially Namasudra, peasants of central Bengal. Its religious doctrines are highly eclectic, consisting entirely of the views of Balak Brahmachari himself as expressed in his sayings, but they are characterized in particular by a curious involvement in political matters. The sect's mouthpiece *Kara Chabuk* [The Strong Whip] regularly published its leader's comments on current political subjects in which there was the recurrent theme of "revolution," a cataclysmic churning that would surgically cleanse a corrupt and putrid social order. The sect, in fact, first came into the public spotlight in the period 1967–1971 when it participated in political demonstrations in support of the Left parties and against Congress rule. The Santan Dal activists, with many women in their ranks, some in saffron clothes, holding aloft their tridents and shouting their slogan "Ram Narayan Ram," were an incongruous element in Leftist demonstrations in Calcutta at the time, and could not but attract attention. But no one accused the sect of opportunistic political ambitions, because it made no claims to electoral representation or recognition as a political party. Since then, many of the followers of the sect have been known to be sympathizers and even activists of the Left, especially of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), leading partner in the Left Front which has ruled West Bengal continuously since 1977.

On this particular morning in May 1993, the followers of Balak Brahmachari refused to accept that their spiritual leader was dead. They recalled that several years ago, in 1967, he had gone into *samadhi* for twenty-two days during which, from all outward appearances, he was dead. But he had woken up from his trance and returned to normal life. Now once more, they said, their Baba had gone into *nirvikalpa samadhi*, a state of suspension of bodily functions that could be achieved only by those with the highest spiritual powers. The members of Santal Dal took the body of Balak Brahmachari from hospital to their ashram in Sukhchar, a northern suburb of Calcutta, and began to keep what they said would be a long vigil.

Soon the matter became a *cause-célèbre* in Calcutta. The press picked it up, publishing reports of how the body was being kept on slabs of ice under heavy airconditioning. One Bengali daily, *Ajkal*,

pursued the story with particular vigor, turning it into a fight for rational values in public life and against obscurantist beliefs and practices. It accused the local authorities and the health department of the West Bengal government of failing to implement their own rules regarding the disposal of dead bodies and of conniving in the making of a serious public hazard. Soon the authorities were forced to respond. On the thirteenth day of the vigil, the Panihati municipality made clear that it had served the Santal Dal leaders with a notice asking them to cremate the body immediately, but that under the municipal laws it had no powers to carry out a forcible cremation.[25] On behalf of the Santal Dal, Chitta Sikdar, the secretary, kept up a regular defensive campaign in the press, maintaining that the spiritual phenomenon of *nirvikalpa samadhi* was beyond the understanding of medical science and that Balak Brahmachari would soon resume his normal bodily life.

The standoff continued. *Ajkal* raised the tempo of its campaign, opening its columns to prominent intellectuals and public figures who deplored the persistence of such superstitious and unscientific beliefs among the people. Groups of activists from progressive cultural organizations, the popular science movement and the rationalist society began to hold demonstrations in front of the Santan Dal headquarters in Sukhchar. *Ajkal* spared no efforts to provoke the spokesmen of the Dal and to ridicule their statements, refusing to refer to the dead leader by his sectarian name of Balak Brahmachari and instead calling him "Balak Babu"—a nonsensical "Mr. Balak." There were some heated confrontations at the gate of the Santan Dal ashram, with the Dal activists reportedly stocking arms and preparing for a showdown. One night, some crackers and handmade bombs exploded outside the ashram and a group of Dal activists came out and shouted over their loudspeakers: "The revolution has begun."[26]

Nearly a month after the official death of Balak Brahmachari, his body still lay on ice slabs in an airconditioned room with his followers waiting for him to break his *samadhi*. *Ajkal* claimed that there was an unbearable stench in the entire neighborhood of Sukhchar and that the residents of the area had had enough. Now it began to be openly alleged that the government was reluctant to intervene because

of politics. The elections to the local government bodies in rural West Bengal, the crucial panchayats which had become the backbone of Left Front support, were scheduled for the last week of May. Any action against the Dal could antagonize a lot of Left Front supporters in at least four districts of West Bengal. It was also suggested that some important leaders of the CPI(M) were sympathetic to the Santan Dal and that one minister in particular, Subhas Chakrabarti, minister in charge of tourism and sports, was regarded by Dal members as a fraternal supporter.

On June 25, 1993, fifty-one days after the official death of Balak Brahmachari, the health minister of West Bengal announced that a medical team consisting of leading specialists in medicine, neurology and forensic medicine would examine the body of Balak Brahmachari and submit a report to the government. The Indian Medical Association, the apex professional body of medical practitioners, immediately protested saying that to call for a new examination implied a lack of confidence in the death certificate issued from the hospital. It pointed out that no scientific grounds had been furnished to question the original judgment of the hospital doctors. The government doctors went ahead nevertheless and returned from Sukhchar to say that they had not been allowed to touch the body. They reported that the body had been putrefied and carried signs of mummification and that it had not decayed completely because of the extremely low temperature at which it had been kept.[27]

By this time, Subhas Chakrabarti had been given charge by the CPI(M) leadership to devise a solution to the impasse. Accompanied by the local CPI(M) leaders, he visited the Sukhchar ashram and later told journalists that he was trying to persuade the followers of the Baba to cremate the body. He agreed that there was no scientific reason for doctors to reexamine a body that had been certified as dead, but insisted that this was a necessary part of the process of persuasion. He pointed out that "Babadom" was still prevalent in the country and that thousands of people were followers of these religious leaders. He warned that it was dangerous to take religious fanaticism lightly. It was the government's view, he said, that applying force could

provoke fanaticism. When asked if he was aware of the health hazard that had been created in the neighborhood of Sukhchar, he claimed that he had smelt nothing, but that was probably because he was a habitual inhaler of snuff.[28]

On June 30, in a four-hour operation beginning at two in the morning, a force consisting of 5,000 policemen stormed the Santan Dal headquarters, took charge of the body, and removed it to a nearby crematorium. *The Telegraph* reported that the last rites were performed by the guru's brother "as the security cordon pushed back wailing women who still believed their departed cult leader would be resurrected. The state government, severely criticised for soft-pedalling the issue, heaved a sigh of relief." The police force, which was attacked by Dal activists with acid bulbs, knives, tridents, glass bottles, and chilli powder, used tear gas shells to immobilize the defenders and blow-torches to make its way through window grilles and collapsible gates into the heavily fortified headquarters. But it did not resort to shooting. Many Dal activists as well as policemen were hurt, but, as the official press release put it, "there were no casualties."[29]

The minister Subhas Chakrabarti congratulated the police and the local administration for carrying out a very difficult and sensitive operation. He referred to the popular Hindi film *Jugnu* and said the job was more difficult than what the actor Dharmendra had faced in that film. "Of course," he said to journalists, "you think all that is lumpen culture, but I think it is an apt example." The following day, *Ajkal* in its editorial announced: "We have come to the end of that age in West Bengal when lumpen culture could be called lumpen culture. Progressive West Bengal has seen the end of the age of reason. Now begins the age of *Jugnu*."[30]

Despite the relatively smooth and successful conclusion of the matter, the controversy did not die down. Chitta Sikdar, the secretary of the Santan Dal, protested to the chief minister against what he described as an authoritarian and undemocratic action of the government. He said the treatment received by Balak Brahmachari at the hands of the rulers of society would be remembered in history in the same way as the trials of Jesus Christ, Galileo, and Socrates. On

the other hand, opinions such as that of *Ajkal* condemned as opportunistic the attempt by sections of the government and the ruling party to target the second-rank leaders of the sect for misleading their innocent followers and profiting from their overexcited religious sentiments but not criticizing the sects and the so-called godmen themselves for spreading unreason and superstition. Twelve days after the cremation of Balak Brahmachari, the secretary of the Santan Dal and eighty-two others were arrested and charged with rioting, assault, obstruction of justice, and other offenses.[31]

Members of the Santan Dal continued for several months to write letters to newspapers portraying themselves as victims of an undemocratic and illegal police action. They asked what laws of the land the Baba's followers had broken by believing that he would come back to them. Did a religious belief in extraordinary spiritual powers deserve blows from the policeman's truncheon? And was it not the case that the Dal followers were finally subjected to police action because most of them were low-caste peasants whose marginal political value had evaporated after the local government elections were over? While public memory might be short, one letter warned, the memory of victimhood was merciless. The perpetrators of injustice would one day meet their day of judgment.[32]

The case illustrates, I think, several of the points I have raised so far about the relation between civil society and democracy in a country like India. A modern civil society, consistent with the ideas of freedom and equality, is a project that is located in the historical desires of certain elite sections of Indians. The specific story of the emergence and flowering of those desires and their sources in colonial projects has been much discussed. When the country was under colonial rule, these elites believed the crucial transformative processes that would change the traditional beliefs and practices of the people and fashion a new modern national self must be kept out of the reach of the colonial state apparatus. With the end of colonial rule and the coming to power of these classes in the postcolonial state, that transformative project became firmly located in the dynamic potential of the organs of the new national state. That those organs were now part of a constitutional system of representative democracy made the

modernizing project an expression of the will of the people and thus gloriously consistent with the legitimizing norms of modernity itself.

Although many of the sites and activities characteristic of the arena I have called political society can be shown to have emerged within the spectrum of nationalist political mobilizations in the colonial period, I would say that it has taken on something like a distinct form only since the 1980s. Two conditions have facilitated this process. One is the rise to dominance of a notion of governmental performance that emphasizes the welfare and protection of populations—the "pastoral" functions of government, as Michel Foucault called it—using similar governmental technologies all over the world but largely independent of considerations of active participation by citizens in the sovereignty of the state. This has enabled the mutual recognition by state agencies and population groups that governments are obliged to deliver certain benefits even to people who are not proper members of civil society or of the republican body of true citizens. If the nation-state cannot do this job, it must be done by nongovernmental—if necessary, international—agencies The second condition is the widening of the arena of political mobilization, prompted by electoral considerations and often only for electoral ends, from formally organized structures such as political parties with well-ordered internal constitutions and coherent doctrines and programs to loose and often transient mobilizations, building on communication structures that would not be ordinarily recognized as political (for instance, religious assemblies or cultural festivals, or more curiously, even associations of cinema fans, as in some of the southern Indian states).

The proliferation of activities in this arena of political society has caused much discomfort and apprehension in progressive elite circles in recent years. The comment about "lumpen culture" in the *Ajkal* editorial I cited earlier is typical. The complaint is widespread in middle-class circles today that politics has been taken over by mobs and criminals. The result is the abandonment—or so the complaint goes—of the mission of the modernizing state to change a backward society. Instead, what we see is the importation of the disorderly, corrupt, and irrational practices of unreformed popular culture into the very hallways and chambers of civic life, all because of the cal-

culations of electoral expediency. The noble pursuit of modernity appears to have been seriously compromised because of the compulsions of parliamentary democracy.

Given a history in India of more than a hundred years of modern representative institutions, we can now see a pattern of evolution of this familiar Tocquevillian problem.[33] Early Indian liberals like Dadabhai Naoroji or Gopal Krishna Gokhale or even Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the early phase of his political life were entirely convinced of the inherent value of those institutions, but they were also hugely circumspect about the conditions in which those institutions could function. As good nineteenth-century liberals, they would have been the first to specify requirements such as education and a proved commitment to civic life that would have to be met before a people could be considered fit, in their language, "to receive parliamentary institutions." If we look at it from another angle, we might say that for men like Naoroji or Gokhale, democracy was a good form of government only when it could be adequately controlled by men of status and wisdom. With the rise of the so-called Extremists in nationalist politics, especially with the Khilafat and Noncooperation movements, there came into organized political life in India many forces and many ideas that did not care too much about the niceties of parliamentary politics. It was Gandhi, of course, who in this period, intervened decisively in the political arena created by the new representative institutions of the late colonial order. Even as he claimed to reject parliamentary institutions along with all of the other trappings of modern civilization, he was more instrumental than anyone else in bringing about the mobilization that would in the end make the Indian National Congress the ruling political organization of independent India. As has been shown in many studies, Gandhi's words and actions are shot through by the parallel themes of unleashing popular initiative and controlling it at the same time.[34] With the formalization of Congress rule in the first decade and a half after independence, control became the dominant motif in the close interweaving of state initiative and electoral approval in the so-called Congress system of the Nehru period.

The journey from the Nehru period to the crisis of the mid-1960s to the reestablishment of Congress dominance in the state populism

of the first Indira Gandhi regime is a trajectory that is not unfamiliar to the historical experience of many third-world countries. What was distinctive in the life of Indian democracy is, I think, the defeat of Indira Gandhi's emergency regime in a parliamentary election. It brought about a decisive shift in all subsequent discussion about the essence and appearance of democracy, its form and content, its inner nature and outward appearance. Whatever may be the judgment of historians on the "real" causes of the collapse of the emergency regime, the 1977 elections established in the arena of popular mobilizations in India the capacity of the vote and of representative bodies of government to give voice to popular demands of a kind that had never before been allowed to disturb the order and tranquility of the proverbial corridors of power. One cannot but wonder if this is not the momentous experience that separates the popular understanding of democracy in India from that in neighboring Pakistan where it has been possible in recent times for both elites and subalterns to say in unison that electoral democracy is a fake and that the path to true democracy may have to pass through a spell of military dictatorship.

But lest we in India be too quick to congratulate ourselves, let me restate my argument. The contrary themes of popular legitimacy and elite control—the perennial problem of democratic theory itself as represented by the two mediating concepts of community and property—were embedded in the conception of Indian democracy from the very beginning. They have not gone away, nor have they been resolved or superseded. They have only taken new forms as a result of the ongoing struggles between elite and popular conceptions of democracy. They are being played out once again in the recent debates over democratic modernization in India. On the one hand, the uncertain demands of popular ratification have led committed modernizers to throw up their hands and lament that the age of reason had been brought to an end by the political surrender to the forces of disorder and irrationality. They read the many compromises with electoral compulsions as signs of the abandonment of enlightened politics. Generally less noticed are the transformative effects of these contrary mobilizations among the supposedly unenlightened sections of the population. Since this is an area that is only beginning to be

studied, I can only make certain preliminary observations on it, and will do so in the next chapter. But this constitutes, I believe, the most profound and significant set of social changes that are being produced by the democratic process in countries like India today.

I should also note that one response to these social changes has already evolved among the governing classes in India. I see this as a variant of the colonial strategy of indirect rule. This involves a suspension of the modernization project, walling in the protected zones of bourgeois civil society and dispensing the governmental functions of law and order and welfare through the "natural leaders" of the governed populations. The strategy, in other words, seeks to preserve the civic virtues of bourgeois life from the potential excesses of electoral democracy.

The other response is less cynical, even as it is more pragmatic. It does not abandon the project of enlightenment, but attempts to steer it through the thicket of contestations in what I have called political society. It takes seriously the functions of direction and leadership of a vanguard, but accepts that the legal arm of the state in a country like India cannot reach into a vast range of social practices that continue to be regulated by other beliefs and administered by other authorities. But it also knows that those dark zones are being penetrated by the welfare functions of modern governmental practices, producing those effects on claims and representation that I have called the urge for democratization. This is the zone in which the project of democratic modernity has to operate—slowly, painfully, unsurely.

In bringing up the example of the negotiations over the disposal of a dead body in Calcutta, I was not trying to provide a narrative of the correct handling of contradictions among the people. Nor was I describing a case of successful governance. Nor am I saying that the specific form in which a local crisis of modernity-versus-democracy was resolved on that occasion flowed out of a conscious political project of social transformation in which the ruling parties in West Bengal are engaged. Rather, my intention was to point out the possibilities that exist in that normatively nebulous zone that I have called political society. When I use that term, I am always reminded that in

the *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci begins by equating political society with the state, but soon slides into a whole range of social and cultural interventions that must take place well beyond the domain of the state. It is clear that in pushing the project of turning subaltern subjects into national citizens, the modernizers have encountered resistances that are facilitated by the activities of political society. But I have tried to emphasize that even in resisting the modernizing project that is imposed on them, the subaltern classes also embark on a path of internal transformation. In the next chapter I provide some examples of this incipient process of change. At the same time, in carrying out their pedagogical mission in political society, the educators—enlightened people like us—might also succeed in educating themselves. That, I submit, would be the most enriching and historically significant result of the encounter between modernity and democracy in most of the world.