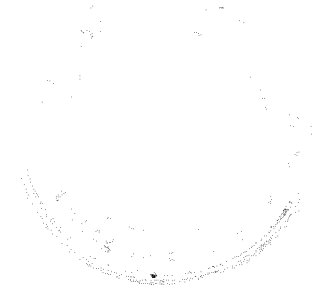# THE POLITICS
OF THE GOVERNED

Reflections on Popular Politics
in Most of the World

PARTHA CHATTERJEE

Graffiti showing shackled Indian minister, bent under the burden of IMF loans. (Amit Dhar, 1984) CHITRABANI; HITESRANJAN SANYAL MEMORIAL ARCHIVE OF THE CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA.

THREE

The Politics of the Governed

I

Let me take you on a quick tour through political society, or at least those parts of it that I am familiar with, because there are many parts about which I know very little.

Our first stop is along the railway tracks that run through the southern part of the city of Calcutta, not far from where I live and work. A major arterial road flies over the tracks. If you stand on the bridge and look in front of you, you will see high-rise apartment blocks, a ritzy shopping mall, and the offices of a major oil company. But if you look down, you will see a narrow line of shanties, with irregular tin or tile roofs lined with dirty plastic sheets, running all along and perilously close to the railway tracks. These belong to squatters who have been living here for more than fifty years. In the early 1990s, some of my colleagues at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, under the direction of Asok Sen, carried out a study of one section of these shanties.[1] This section has the official name of Gobindapur Rail Colony Gate Number 1 and contains a population of about 1,500 people.

The settlement apparently emerged in the late 1940s when a small group of peasants from southern Bengal, who had lost their lands in the aftermath of the great famine of 1943, came to the city in search of a livelihood. Soon there were thousands of others streaming into the city every day. These new migrants were from eastern Bengal, now East Pakistan. They were refugees produced by the partition of India. Over the next decade, the suburbs of Calcutta would accommodate

a refugee immigration of more than three times the original population of the city. Most of them settled on public, and sometimes private, property—illegally but with the tacit acquiescence of the authorities, because where else would they go? The refugee settlements acquired the official, and popular, name of "colonies."

The stories told by some of the early settlers of our railway colony make it seem almost like a frontier settlement. Four or five men took the lead in organizing the place. They invited in new settlers, divided up plots, helped build the huts and shacks. They also charged rents from the new settlers. Adhir Mandal and Haren Manna were the two key men in the colony until the mid-1970s.[2] They had made links with the Communist Party, the growing opposition political force with strong support among the refugee populations in the city. They dealt with the railway authorities, the police, and other government agencies on behalf of the colony. Adhir Mandal owned about two hundred shacks which he rented out and was known at this time as the *zamindar* of the rail colony—the landlord—such was his dominance. Communist Party leaders now say that Adhir and a few others were the "local vested interests" although they were with the party. "They behaved like bullies," one party leader said, "and were involved in petty graft and extortion. Adhir was very clever. . . . Haren Manna often stole a part of the funds he raised for the party. We overlooked these things since it was difficult to find a replacement for him. . . . How could we expect to find in the rail colony an honest person with Haren's drive and initiative?"

From time to time the railway authorities would make attempts to remove the squatters and reclaim the land. In 1965, the railway engineers tried to build a wall to encircle the settlement. The residents set up a human wall, with women in the front, preventing the trucks carrying the building materials from coming near the colony. During the emergency in 1975, there was a serious threat of eviction. Some nearby settlements were razed to the ground by bulldozers. Our rail colony residents mobilized a member of the state assembly from the pro-Soviet Communist Party, then allied with Indira Gandhi's ruling Congress Party, to intercede with the chief minister and dissuade the

railway authorities from carrying out the demolition. The threat passed.

What we have said so far will not be unfamiliar to those who have read or heard about political mobilization within the electoral system inaugurated in postcolonial India. There are hundreds of similar stories that have come from the cities and villages of India. They were generally summarized under a theory of patron-client relationships, of vote banks, of faction leaders. One distinct feature of our case might have been the involvement of the cadre-based, deeply ideological, Communist Party, but even that, as we saw from the interview with the party leader, was not, at least in this case, very much more than a mutual arrangement of convenience. The party made no claims that Adhir Mandal or Haren Manna were communist revolutionaries mobilizing the people for political action. This was not political society as I have described it.

A new trend, however, emerged from the early 1980s. Adhir Mandal, the so-called *zamindar*, was now dead. In 1983, the railways again attempted to put a fence around the settlement. The residents organized once more to resist the move. They had a new leader now, a somewhat unlikely character named Anadi Bera. He was called the Master, because he ran a primary school across the street from the rail colony. Although lacking a high school education Bera taught the poor children of the area to read and write. His real popularity, however, was as a theatre enthusiast. He organized and acted in amateur *jatra* performances, the open air theatre-in-the-round form so popular in Bengal. It was through his theatrical activities that he came in touch with the residents of the rail colony. He had his own problems with accommodation, and soon he rented a shack in the colony and moved in.

Anadi Bera was the chief organizer of the resistance by the squatters in 1983. In 1986, he set up a new association of the residents of the colony—Jana Kalyan Samiti, the People's Welfare Association—with the objective of starting a medical center and a library. The local municipal officials, political party leaders, officers of the local police station, and prominent middle-class residents of the neighboring

apartment blocks were regularly approached to raise funds for the association or to be involved with its activities. The government had started a major health and literacy program for children in urban slums called the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). At Anadi Bera's initiative, the ICDS opened a child-care unit at the rail colony. The unit was located in the association's office room. The ICDS immunizes children against polio, tuberculosis, tetanus, and other diseases, provides them with a daily snack, and has a trained staff to run a play school and to provide counseling to parents on birth control options. The ICDS staff also maintains a detailed record of the livelihoods, income, consumption, and health of every family in the colony.

The ICDS scheme is one example of how the residents of our squatters' colony could organize to get themselves identified as a distinct population group that could receive the benefits of a governmental program. But that is not the only instance. Having set up the association, the residents now use this collective form to deal with other governmental agencies such as the railways, the police or municipal authorities, with NGOs offering welfare or developmental services, and with political parties and leaders. For instance, if one inquired about how the colony got electricity, since electric fans and television sets are not uncommon appliances in the shacks, the residents are usually evasive. At least, that is how it was at the time of Professor Asok Sen's fieldwork. One suspected then that electric wires were illegally tapped. But there are many stories from Indian cities where electric companies, faced with the persistent theft of electricity and the legal difficulty of recognizing illegal squatters as legitimate individual consumers, have negotiated collective rental arrangements with entire squatter settlements represented precisely through associations of the kind we have described. There is thus an entire set of paralegal arrangements that can grow in order to deliver civic services and welfare benefits to population groups whose very habitation or livelihood lies on the other side of legality. I later found out that sometime in the late 1980s, the colony actually did obtain a legal electricity connection through six community meters organized by their Welfare Association. Not only that, since 1996, the residents even

have individual electrical connections. The municipal authority also supplies them with water and public toilet facilities. All of this, of course, on illegally occupied public land barely a yard or two away from the railway lines. But I am getting ahead of my story.

Although the crucial move here was for our squatters to seek and find recognition as a population group, which from the standpoint of governmentality is only a usable *empirical* category that defines the targets of policy, they themselves have had to find ways of investing their collective identity with a moral content. This is an equally crucial part of the politics of the governed: *to give to the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community.* In the case of our rail colony, there was no pre-given communal form readily available to them. Some of the residents came from southern Bengal, others from the former East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Most of them belong to different middle and low castes, although there is a sprinkling of upper castes too. A survey carried out in the mid-1990s found that 56 percent of the residents belonged to the Scheduled Castes, the legally recognized category of former untouchable castes that are entitled to affirmative benefits from the government, and 4 percent to the Scheduled Tribes; the rest are other Hindu castes.[3]

The community, such as it exists here, was built from scratch. When the leading members of the association speak about the colony and its struggles, they do not talk of the shared interests of the members of an association. Rather, they describe the community in the more compelling terms of a shared kinship. The most common metaphor they use is that of the family. "We are all a single family," said Ashu Das, an active member of the association. "We don't distinguish between refugees from East Bengal and those from villages in West Bengal. We have no other place to build our homes. We have collectively occupied this land for so many years. This is the basis for our claim to our own homes."

Badal Das, another resident, explains why they have to stick together as a family. "We live in the face of the tiger," he said, using a saying that is common in southern Bengal, where tigers and humans have long lived as adversaries, to refer figuratively to the ever-present threat of eviction. But it is not any prior biological or even cultural

affinity that defines this family. Rather, it is the collective occupation of a piece of land—a territory clearly defined in time and space and one that is under threat.

It is remarkable how clearly the residents define the limits of their so-called family: they are defined by the territorial limits of the "colony." Ashu Das explained: "The other side of the bridge is another neighborhood. That area should be left to the men of that neighborhood. We don't cross the limits." Those limits are often crucial in determining claims: who can become members of the association, who must contribute to collective festivities, or who can demand jobs as security guards in the middle-class apartment blocks in the neighborhood.

Within the so-called family, now, there is much internal variety. Few men have specialized skills or stable jobs: most go out looking for temporary jobs as laborers in the construction business. The women usually work as domestic help in neighboring middle-class houses and are often the principal earners in their households. In the early 1990s, when this study was carried out, the earnings of the colony residents varied from Rs.1,000 ($30) to below Rs.100 ($3) per month per capita. A different survey carried out a few years later found that more than half the families had total earnings of less than Rs.2,000 per month, the average income of the settlement being less than Rs.500 per capita per month. Some were owners of shacks rented out to other residents—all outside the pale of the law, of course, because no one had any legal title—but there appeared to be little conflict here between landlords and tenants.

Most disputes between neighbors and even between marital partners were settled by the Welfare Association. Not everyone was happy with this intrusiveness. One woman who had moved into the colony after her marriage said that she found her neighbors too nosey and given to backbiting. But community life was also sustained by sports activities, collective viewing of television shows and videos, and by religious festivals. The biggest festival organized by the association is the annual worship of the goddess Sitala. She has a curious history, originating in rural south Bengal as a folk goddess dispensing or preventing the spread of smallpox. In recent years, now that smallpox

has been eradicated, she has emerged in the slums of Calcutta as a goddess who generally looks after the health of her children. She is now worshipped in week-long festivals, financed by small donations from slum residents, in defiant imitation of the middle-class festival of the much better known and infinitely more glamorous Brahminical goddess Durga. During the Sitala festival, the association organizes musical shows and *jatra* performances, their "master" Anadi Bera naturally taking a leading role. A lesser festival is the worship of the goddess Kali where the younger men of the colony are given a free rein, with video shows, meat-eating and drinking.

The People's Welfare Association created by the residents of Rail Colony Gate Number One is not an association of civil society. It springs from a collective violation of property laws and civic regulations. The state cannot recognize it as having the same legitimacy as other civic associations pursuing more legitimate objectives. The squatters, on their part, admit that their occupation of public land is both illegal and contrary to good civic life. But they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right and use their association as the principal collective instrument to pursue that claim. In one of its petitions to the railway authorities, the association wrote:

> Among us are refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan and landless people from South Bengal. Having lost everything—means of livelihood, land and even homestead, we had to come to Calcutta to eke out a living and in search of shelter. . . . we are mostly day labourers and household help, living below the poverty line. We have somehow built a shelter of our own. If our homes are broken and we are evicted from the shanties, we have nowhere to go.

Refugees, landless people, day laborers, homestead, below the poverty line—are all demographic categories of governmentality. That is the ground on which they define their claims. In the same petition, the association also states that "along with other citizens of Calcutta," it is in favor of the improvement and extension of the city's railway services. If, for this purpose, it was "absolutely necessary to shift us from our present dwellings," the association demanded a "suitable

alternative homestead." Thus, alongside its reference to the government's obligation to look after poor and underprivileged population groups, the association was also appealing to the moral rhetoric of a community striving to build a decent social life under extremely harsh conditions and, at the same time, affirming the duties of good citizenship. The categories of governmentality were being invested with the imaginative possibilities of community, including its capacity to invent relations of kinship, to produce a new, even if somewhat hesitant, rhetoric of political claims.

These claims are irreducibly political. They could only be made on a political terrain, where rules may be bent or stretched, and not on the terrain of established law or administrative procedure. The success of these claims depends entirely on the ability of particular population groups to mobilize support to influence the implementation of governmental policy in their favor. But this success is necessarily temporary and contextual. The strategic balance of political forces could change and rules may no longer be bent as before. As I have pointed out, governmentality always operates on a heterogeneous social field, on multiple population groups, and with multiple strategies. Here there is no equal and uniform exercise of the rights of citizenship.

Thus, it is quite possible for the equilibrium of strategic politics to shift enough for these squatters to be evicted tomorrow. (In fact, in early 2002, after these lectures were delivered, a citizens' group successfully moved a public interest litigation in the Calcutta High Court demanding the eviction of the settlers in the rail colony because they were polluting the waters of the Rabindra Sarobar lake in south Calcutta. A substantial section of the squatters had, in the meantime, shifted their allegiance from the Left Front to the Trinamul Congress. In early March, they managed to physically beat back a police force sent in by the government to implement the court order. They are now hoping against hope that their party leader would soon be reinstated as Railway Minister in the Union government in New Delhi; they might then get rehabilitation before they are forcibly evicted. Such is the tenuous logic of strategic politics in political society.)

To illustrate how a shift in the strategic balance of political forces can dramatically affect the lives of thousands of people surviving on the margins of urban life, let us walk up the avenue about half a mile to the north of the railway tracks. This is Gariahat, the heart of middle-class south Calcutta. They are now building a new fly-over at the busy crossing here. A year or so ago, these were wide avenues, with broad sidewalks and brightly lit shop-fronts. Middle-class residents were happy that their city was being restored to its original beauty and charm, before the streets and sidewalks had been taken over by thousands of street vendors. For almost thirty years since the mid-1960s, the major roads of the city were clogged with rows of shabby kiosks, occupying most of the sidewalks and frequently spilling on to the roadway itself. The pavement stalls were clearly performing an important economic function and providing a low-level but vital source of livelihood to thousands of people. The vendors had operated strategically in political society, successfully mobilizing support among citizens and political parties to establish and maintain their tenuous, and clearly illegal, occupation of the streets. In the mid-1990s, however, the tide turned. There was increasing pressure on the communist-led government of West Bengal to clean up Calcutta in order to attract foreign investment in growth sectors such as petrochemicals and electronics. The government's support among the urban middle classes was falling sharply. In 1996, Subhas Chakrabarti, the minister who had successfully organized the disposal of Balak Brahmachari's dead body, was given charge of clearing the Calcutta streets. Over a period of two weeks, in a well-planned coordinated action codenamed Operation Sunshine, municipal authorities and the police demolished all street-side stalls in Calcutta, cleared the sidewalks, expanded the roadways and planted trees. The vendors were still organized. Sensing that they were being abandoned by the Left, they now turned to the opposition parties. They did not resist physically; there were no violent confrontations. But the political balance having turned against them, they had to yield their place on the streets and wait until the promises of rehabilitation materialized.

Not every population group is able to operate successfully in political society and, as we have just seen, even when it is, its successes

are often temporary. To give you an example of an organized group that clearly failed to make any headway in political society, let us move further north to the older part of the city—to College Street, where the old campus of the university is still located and which is the seat of the Bengali publishing industry. There is an entire neighborhood here of labyrinthine lanes and alleys where the principal activity is the printing, production, and selling of books. One can find an amazing mix of business organizations and technologies here, from large corporate houses with modern phototypesetting equipment to tiny owner-operated letterpresses where texts are still typeset by hand and where one could come upon a hand-operated treadle machine in perfect working order bearing the inscription "Made in Manchester 1882." In the 1990s, the letterpress was virtually wiped off the face of Calcutta—the effect of the global spread of electronic printing in every conceivable language and font. But another part of the publishing industry—bookbinding—continues to use technology that, in more than 120 years, has not changed in the slightest. We could walk into any of the binderies here and, except for the dim electric lamps and perhaps a transistor radio blaring film music, we could be in a nineteenth-century bookbinding workshop. An entire municipal ward here is called Daftaripara—the bookbinders' quarter—where there are 500 binderies employing 4,000 workers. My colleagues at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences surveyed the bookbinders in 1990.[4]

There are many different kinds of bookbinding units and workers, coexisting for the most part on the bare margins of viability and frequently in competition with one another. The few large units have twenty or more workers each and floor space of 3,000 square feet or more. Their permanent workers are on monthly salaries that, in 1990, could go up to Rs.600 ($18) and enjoy the benefits of paid leave and pension. The vast majority of units are, however, of medium or small size, where the owners are also workers and there are often no more than two or three employees. Nearly a third of the workers are employed only during the peak business seasons. The average wages of skilled male workers in 1990 was around Rs.500 ($15) a month and that of the relatively unskilled women workers around Rs.400 ($12)

if they worked a full eight hours a day. There are children too, employed as "boys" (regardless of gender, they are all "boys" here)—helping hands who could be engaged in all sorts of jobs from fetching tea to loading and unloading piles of books. They could earn about Rs.150 ($4.50) a month if they are paid in cash at all, because frequently all they get is food, clothes, and a place to sleep. These earnings are extremely low by the standards of industrial employment in India, but this is an unorganized industry lodged deep inside what is called the informal sector.

There were concerted attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to unionize the bookbinding workers and bargain with the owners for better pay. Activists of the Communist Party (Marxist) took a lead in this, especially after their party formed the state government in 1977. In 1990, there was a three-day strike in the binderies of Daftaripara. The form of the strike and its results are instructive. The workers demanded a wage increase of Rs.100 a month. But 90 percent of binderies were units whose owners were themselves workers. Everyone knew that most owners would never be able to pay the increased wage. The strike then became one in which the entire industry at Daftaripara—owners and workers together—tried to put pressure on publishers to pay more for binding jobs. The bigger publishers threatened to get their jobs done from other units in the city or even from outside the state. In the end, when the large binderies in Daftaripara agreed to increase wages by Rs.75 a month, the strikers declared a great victory and called off the agitation. Following the strike, union activities in Daftaripara were once more at a low ebb.

Unlike what we saw in the rail colony, there is very little sense in Daftaripara of a collective identity of bookbinders. Here are 4,000 people in the same trade, in a small urban neighborhood. Most of the men sleep in their workshops at night and go home to their villages on weekends and holidays. The women come from the suburbs, usually from refugee or squatter colonies like the one we saw earlier. They travel by train but cannot afford to buy tickets, choosing instead to flee when the conductors make an appearance. The workers in Daftaripara generally vote for the Left parties, but they know about politics from their rural connections, not because their lives as work-

ers lead them to politics. Instead, they speak of ties of loyalty between owner and worker, of mutual acts of kindness, of paternal care. A retired worker, the venerable Habib Mia, speaks of the *inqilab* or revolution that had overtaken the country after the British left, so that now not even the wealthy and the propertied can take care of the poor.[5] But there is no engagement here with the apparatus of governmentality. The bookbinders of Daftaripara have not made their way into political society. Their example shows once more the difficulties of class organization in the so-called informal sector of labor, where the capitalist and the petty mode of production are intertwined in a mutually reinforcing tangle. Despite the sincere efforts of many activists, Leninist strategies of working-class organization have foundered here. The political leaders of the Left have instead turned their attention elsewhere and found much greater success—in political society.

II

The real story of political society must come from rural West Bengal. That is where the Left parties have converted the functions of governmentality into potent and amazingly stable sources of local support from a clear majority of population groups. Much has been written on how this was done—from land reforms to the institution of democratic local government in the villages to the maintenance of a tightly disciplined party organization to, as some critics allege, selective and carefully calibrated violence. But, for my discussion here, I will focus on the problem I raised in an earlier chapter: how can the particular claims of marginal population groups, often grounded in violations of the law, be made consistent with the pursuit of equal citizenship and civic virtue? To produce a viable and persuasive politics of the governed, there has to be a considerable act of mediation. Who can mediate?

You will remember the key figure in the successful mobilization of our rail colony into the arena of political society. He is the Master— the theatre enthusiast Anadi Bera. The fact that he was popularly known by his role as the teacher of a primary school is not insignificant. The school teacher was probably the most ubiquitous figure in

the recent expansion of political society in rural West Bengal. In 1997, Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, one of my colleagues in Calcutta, studied the political role of school teachers in two districts of West Bengal.[6]

In Purulia district, he found, most primary school teachers were members of the Communist teachers' association and many held elected positions at different levels of local government. They also held top posts in the party and the peasant organization and had been elected to the state legislature and parliament. Many of them were earlier associated with Gandhian organizations of social work. From the early 1980s, when the Communists pushed their land reforms and agricultural development programs, they wooed the school teachers, who soon were at the forefront of political activities in the district. With the traditional landlord class removed from the political scene, the teachers became crucial to the new politics of consensus that the Left was trying to build in rural West Bengal.

In the 1980s, a popular perception emerged everywhere that school teachers had the will and the ability to find commonly acceptable solutions to local disputes. Since they were salaried, they did not depend on agricultural incomes and thus did not have strong vested interests in land. Most came from peasant backgrounds and were thus thought to be sympathetic to the poor. They were the educated among a society of vast illiteracy. They were familiar with the language of peasants as well as that of the party, well versed in legal and administrative procedures, and yet organically part of the village community. As party leaders in local government, they were crucial in the implementation of governmental policies in the countryside. They interceded with the bureaucracy, using the language of administration, but claiming to speak on behalf of the poor. Simultaneously, they explained government policy and administrative decisions to the people of the village. Their views were frequently taken by government authorities to represent the local consensus: they recommended specific local forms of implementation of government programs, authenticated lists of local beneficiaries, and could be trusted to carry local opinion with them. In the 1980s, school teachers wielded unrivaled power and prestige in the rural districts. It was common to hear villagers saying that their school teacher was the one who most commanded their trust.

Now, before the admirers of Robert Putnam claim support in this evidence for the theory of social capital,[7] let me emphasize once more the distinction I am drawing between civic community in the sense of a liberal civil society and political society as I have described it. The rural poor who mobilize to claim the benefits of various governmental programs do not do so as members of civil society. To effectively direct those benefits toward them, they must succeed in applying the right pressure at the right places in the governmental machinery. This would frequently mean the bending or stretching of rules, because existing procedures have historically worked to exclude or marginalize them. They must, therefore, succeed in mobilizing population groups to produce a local political consensus that can effectively work *against* the distribution of power in society as a whole. This possibility is opened up by the working of political society. When school teachers gain the trust of the rural community to plead the case of the poor and secure the confidence of the administrators to find a local consensus that will stick, they do not embody the trust generated among equal members of a civic community. On the contrary, they mediate between domains that are differentiated by deep and historically entrenched inequalities of power. They mediate between those who govern and those who are governed.

I should add that when there is a successful mobilization of political society to secure the benefits of governmental programs for poor and underprivileged population groups, one could claim that there is an actual expansion of the freedoms of people, enabled by political society, that would not have been ordinarily possible within civil society. Ordinarily, governmental activity takes place within the stratified social structures of class, status, and privilege. Benefits that are meant to be available in general are effectively cornered by those who have greater knowledge of and influence over the system. This is so not only because of what may be described as corruption, that is, the criminal misuse of legal or administrative powers. Rather, it happens well within the normal ambit of legality because some sections of the people simply do not have the knowledge or the will to make claims to what they are entitled. This is a common state of affairs not only in countries like India where the effective civil society

is limited to a small section of "proper" citizens. It is a well known experience in the operation of, let us say, the public health or education services in Western social democracies where the culturally equipped middle class is much better able to use the system than the poor or underprivileged. When the poor in countries like India, mobilized in political society, can affect the implementation of governmental activities in their favor, we must say that they have expanded their freedoms by using means that are not available to them in civil society.[8]

However, my story about school teachers is not a simple story with a happy ending—no story about political society ever is. Bhattacharya's study also found strong evidence of school teachers in rural West Bengal gradually losing the trust they once enjoyed. The state government allowed large pay increases to primary school teachers, all in the cause of improving primary education. If husband and wife were both primary school teachers, which was not uncommon, their combined cash income could be as large as that of the wealthiest village trader. By the early 1990s, the complaint was widespread that school teachers spent all their time in political work and did not teach. The teacher's job had become a lucrative one in rural society and there were allegations of kickbacks for teaching appointments. Once the trusted mediator, school teachers had now developed their own entrenched interests within the power structure. By the end of the 1990s, the Communist Party was clearly finding its teacher comrades a serious liability. The big question now is: how can political society renew itself? Who next will do the mediating?

III

The proper administration of governmental services has been a subject of much recent discussion in the fields of welfare and development. I will not consider here the neoliberal criticisms of the welfare state in Western democracies that have, in many cases, led to a significant reorganization of the sphere of governmentality. Rather, I will turn our attention to some new global technologies of governmentality that claim to ensure that the benefits of development are spread

more evenly and that the poor and the underprivileged do not become its victims. This is an area where international development agencies in particular have recently reformulated their policies and refashioned their instruments in the light of their experience of the resistance to and the failures of various projects. I will focus, in particular, on the question of the resettlement and rehabilitation of populations displaced by development projects.

The World Bank has in the last two decades taken a leading role in formulating a rehabilitation policy and incorporating displacement and rehabilitation issues into project designs. Not surprisingly, following the basic logic of governmentality, the analysis of displacement costs and rehabilitation requirements was done mainly by the economic methods of cost-benefit analysis. At the same time, a set of entitlements was defined for project-affected persons or households losing their habitation or livelihoods. In addition, certain community-based entitlements were also defined for groups losing resources held in common or adversely affected in the performance of their cultural practices (such as losing their places of worship or sacred groves etc.). These entitlements were expected to be enforced through the government or the project-implementing agencies. In recent years, a new literature has emerged that seeks to expand the narrowly economic focus of the analysis of involuntary resettlement.[9] It includes elements such as landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of access to common property, and social disarticulation, as possible consequences of displacement.

Theoretically, this recent reformulation owes a great deal to the capability approach to policy evaluation, embodying a set of substantive freedoms rather than utilities or incomes or primary goods, advocated by the economist Amartya Sen.[10] But devising objective measures of capabilities and practical operational procedures for targeting beneficiaries is not easy. There is also the problem of recognizing the claims of those who, like our rail colony squatters or street vendors, have no legal right to the space they have occupied. An interesting conceptual move that has tried to reorder the numerous ad hoc and paralegal solutions in this area is the distinction between *rights* and

entitlements. Rights belong to those who have proper legal title to the lands or buildings that the authorities acquire; they are, we might say, proper citizens who must be paid the legally stipulated compensation. Those who do not have such rights may nevertheless have entitlements; they deserve not compensation but assistance in rebuilding a home or finding a new livelihood. The problem remains, however, of how these different kinds of rights and entitlements are to be identified and validated and how to ensure that the compensation or assistance reaches the right people.[11]

Faced with resistance by project-affected peoples and the failings of administratively dictated resettlement strategies, one persistent slogan has been to try to ensure the "participation" of the affected people in the rehabilitation process. Arguments have been made that, if carried out effectively and sincerely, this could turn involuntary resettlement into a voluntary one. It has also been argued that although resettlement costs as included within project costs are higher in voluntary resettlements, the projects tend to be more efficient and successful in the end because they can be completed on time and the social and political problems of incomplete rehabilitation can be avoided. The point has now become so much of a cliché in the literature that it is repeated almost as a mantra—by government agencies, funding institutions, project consultants, experts, and activists. Most statements on this point end up by merely repeating the new liberal dogma: "participation of civil society through NGOs." Participation, however, has one meaning when it is seen from the standpoint of those who govern, i.e., as a category of governance. It will have a very different meaning when seen from the position of the governed, i.e., as a practice of democracy.

To give you a sense of some of the conditions of possibility of democracy as the politics of the governed, let me bring you three cases of resettlement that I studied in 2000.[12]

The first case is from the coal mine town of Raniganj near the western border of Bengal with Bihar. The air hangs heavy here with smoke and at night you can see the fires burning in the distant fields. Large settled areas, including densely populated urban areas, are prone to subsidence and underground and surface fires because of

decades of indiscriminate mining. Following several minor and not so minor disasters, efforts have been under way to stabilize the surface and prevent the fires. However, the methods are technically difficult, slow, and extremely expensive. The alternative is to resettle the population at safer locations. After prolonged discussion and some local agitation, the government of India appointed in 1996 a high-level committee, which reported that more than 34,000 houses in 151 locations were in critically unstable areas. The cost of resettlement for about 300,000 people, including housing, land, infrastructure, and shifting allowance, and with no compensation for those who had no legal title, would be about Rs.20 billion ($500 million). It advised that in view of the "urgency" of the matter, resettlement should begin immediately without waiting for the institutional machinery to be put in place.

Apparently, the resettlement work is in progress, but no one in the area could show me any visible signs and most didn't even seem to know. There is a vague sense of the possibility of large-scale disaster, but the people here have lived with this danger for decades and don't seem to be greatly concerned. Resettlement is not tied here with a new developmental project or with new economic opportunities. If there is a sense in the government and public sector agencies that resettlement needs to be carried out as a means of preventing a sudden and massive disaster, there is little urgency in this regard within the population. There does not seem to be any evidence of a "voluntary" move for resettlement. Political society has not been mobilized here to benefit the people.

My second case is from the port and new industrial town of Haldia, across the river from, and to the south of, Calcutta. The Haldia resettlement took place in two phases for two very different projects. The contrast between the two experiences is instructive.

First, land was acquired for the construction of Haldia port from 1963 to 1984. The process of acquisition and resettlement was long, slow, and marked by numerous difficulties including many disputes that ended up in court. Earlier, not everyone who qualified was interested in taking the resettlement plots since they were not conveniently located in relation to their places of agricultural work. In the

early 1990s, with the rapid rise in land prices following the urbanization of the Haldia area, there was a rush of applications for the resettlement plots, some from people (or their sons and daughters) who had been dislocated twenty-five before. As of 2000, more than 1,400 of the original 2,600 families who qualified still remained to be resettled, more than twenty years after their lands were taken.

The next phase of land acquisition came with the new industrialization of Haldia in 1988–91, leading to considerable organized agitation demanding resettlement. In 1995, it was decided that rehabilitation cases would be dealt with on the recommendations of a Rehabilitation Advisory Committee. The Committee would consist of two administrators, two land acquisition officers, and four political persons representing the main government and opposition parties. All processing of applications for resettlement, hearing of cases, allotments, dealing with grievances, were to be done by this committee.

The general impression among administrators, political leaders and affected persons seems to be that this has been a successful procedure. The idea is that the task of formulating the specific norms, under prevailing local circumstances, of qualifying for rehabilitation plots and of identifying genuine cases deserving rehabilitation should be done on the basis of a ground-level agreement between political representatives. Since the agreement would involve both the government party and the party of opposition, it could be assumed that this would represent an effective local consensus. Once an agreement was reached at this level, the task of the administration was simply to carry out the decisions.

The important assumption here is, of course, that the political parties effectively cover the entire range of interests and opinions. Given the highly politicized, organized, and polarized nature of rural society in most of West Bengal today, this may not be an unwarranted assumption. If there was a third organized political force in the area which also represented a distinct set of voices, it would also have had to be accommodated within such a committee if it was to be effective.

The Committee decided, for instance, that the minimum rehabilitation plot would be 0.04 acres, that families with a larger number of dependents would get larger plots, that no one could get cash

instead of rehabilitation plots, that those who owned houses elsewhere would not qualify, that those who had built structures on their homesteads in anticipation of the land being acquired would not qualify, etc. All of these matters were decided on the basis of local investigations and the feeling was that if both political parties were represented, there was no way that the qualification criteria could be misapplied. The Committee also decided that particular plots in the rehabilitation areas would be drawn by lottery, with the displaced persons drawing their own lots. Consequently, there could be no complaints that particular individuals had been favored with better located plots. Looking through the decisions made by the committee, I even found cases where it reversed its earlier decisions in the light of new information brought to its notice by the political representatives and one case where a woman was given a rehabilitation plot on humanitarian grounds even though she did not meet the stipulated norms.

My third resettlement case is from Rajarhat, to the northeast of Calcutta, where a new town is coming up. In the course of only a few years, it is being transformed from a rural agricultural area to a virtual extension of the Calcutta urban metropolis. As a result, land prices in the area have skyrocketed. As soon as news spread of the New Town project, property developers and land speculators swooped on the small landowners and tried to buy them out before the land acquisition process began. Apart from the rapidly soaring land prices, another problem was that all values of land sales in urban and semiurban areas are routinely under-recorded for registration purposes in order to avoid taxes. The official decision was to encourage voluntary resettlement by offering market prices. But if market prices were determined by the legal records of land sales in the area, no one would be induced to part with their lands voluntarily.

The decision was then made to acquire land at "negotiated" prices. A Land Procurement Committee was set up to negotiate an acceptable price with the affected persons. Not surprisingly, the Committee included local representatives of the government as well as the opposition political parties. The result, it is claimed, is a virtually trouble-free acquisition with almost no court cases. Owners were compensated within three months (since there was no official price

fixing)—this was a record by any standards. The cost of acquisition was certainly higher than would have been the case if the normal legal procedure had been followed. But then the project would have been delayed. And since the object of the project was to develop new urban land for sale, the increased cost could be absorbed in the prices to be charged from those who would be given the developed lands.[13]

This is political society in an active relationship with the procedures of governmentality. Political society has here found a place in the general political culture. Here, people are not unaware of their possible entitlements or ignorant of the means of making themselves heard. Rather, they have formally recognized political representatives who they can use to mediate on their behalf. However, the form will work only if all have a stake in the success of the particular project, or else some mediators will wreck the consensus. Further, the form is likely to work only if the governmental authority follows the recommendations of the political representatives but is itself outside the ambit of electoral politics. That is to say, the governmental body and the political body must be kept separate but put in a relationship in which the latter can influence the former. But the distinction between the governmental and the political must be clearly maintained.

The decisions recorded by the governmental authorities hide the actual negotiations that must have taken place in political society. We are not told on what specific criteria the political representatives finally agreed on the list of beneficiaries. It is entirely possible that the negotiations on the ground did not respect the principles of bureaucratic rationality or even the provisions of the law. We know that in one case at least a person was included in the list of beneficiaries because the representatives felt she deserved to be on it even though she did not qualify according to the prescribed norms. In Rajarhat, we know from other sources that the local consensus includes an understanding that a part of the compensation to be paid to the owners of land would be distributed to tenants and laborers who have lost their livelihoods. This is entirely beyond the purview of what the governmental authority needs to recognize, or even know, but it presupposes it by accepting the recommendations of the political representatives.

We must also remember that a local consensus among rival political representatives is likely to reflect the locally dominant interests and values. It would be effective in securing the demands of those who are able to find organized political support, but could ignore and even suppress demands of locally marginalized interests. Besides, let us not forget that a local political consensus is also likely to be socially conservative and could be particularly insensitive, for instance, to gender or minority issues. As I have mentioned a few times before, political society will bring into the hallways and corridors of power some of the squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life. But if one truly values the freedom and equality that democracy promises, then one cannot imprison it within the sanitized fortress of civil society.

You may have noticed that when I describe political society as a site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of governmental agencies aimed at population groups, I frequently talk of administrative processes that are *paralegal* and of collective claims that appeal to ties of *moral solidarity*. It is important, I think, to emphasize once more how political society is located in relation to the legal-political forms of the modern state itself. The ideals of popular sovereignty and equal citizenship enshrined within the modern state are, as I have mentioned in an earlier chapter, mediated by and realized through the two dimensions of property and community. Property is the conceptual name of the regulation by law of relations between individuals in civil society. Even where social relations are not, or have not yet been, molded into the proper forms of civil society, the state must nevertheless maintain the fiction that in the constitution of its sovereignty, all citizens belong to civil society and are, by virtue of that legally constructed fact, equal subjects of the law. Yet in the actual administration of governmental services, as we have repeatedly noticed, the fictive quality of this legal construct must be recognized and dealt with. What results is a dual strategy: on the one hand, paralegal arrangements that modify, rearrange or supplement on the contingent terrain of political society the formal structures of property that must, on the other hand, continue to be affirmed and protected within the legally constituted domain of civil society. Property is, we know, the crucial dimension along which cap-

ital overlaps with the modern state. It is over property then that we see, on the terrain of political society, a dynamic *within* the modern state of the transformation of precapitalist structures and of premodern cultures. It is there that we can observe a struggle over the real, rather than the merely formal, distribution of rights among citizens. Consequently, it is in political society that we are able to discern the shifting historical horizon of political modernity in most of the world, where just as the fictive ideal of civil society may wield a powerful influence on the forces of political change, so can the actual transactions over the everyday distribution of rights and entitlements lead over time to substantial redefinitions of property and law within the actually existing modern state. The paralegal then, despite its ambiguous and supplementary status in relation to the legal, is not some pathological condition of retarded modernity, but rather part of the very process of the historical constitution of modernity in most of the world.

Community, on the other hand, is conferred legitimacy within the domain of the modern state only in the form of the nation. Other solidarities that could potentially come into conflict with the political community of the nation are subject to a great deal of suspicion. We have seen, however, that the activities of governmental functions produce numerous classes of actual populations that come together to act politically. To effectively make its claim in political society, a population group produced by governmentality must be invested with the moral content of community. This is a major part of the politics of governmentality. Here there are many imaginative possibilities for transforming an empirically assembled population group into the morally constituted form of a community. I have already argued that it is both unrealistic and irresponsible to condemn all such political transformations as divisive and dangerous.

However, I have not told you very much at all about the dark side of political society. That is not because I am unaware of its existence but because I cannot claim to fully understand how criminality or violence are tied to the ways in which various deprived population groups must struggle to make their claims to governmental care. I believe I have said enough about political society to suggest that in

the field of popular democratic practice, crime and violence are not fixed black-and-white legal categories; they could be open to a great deal of political negotiation. It is a fact, for instance, that in the last two and a half decades, there has been a distinct rise in the public, and political, outbreak of caste violence in India, in a period which has seen without doubt the most rapid expansion of democratic assertion by the hitherto oppressed castes. We also have numerous examples when violent movements by deprived regional, tribal or other minority groups have been followed by a quick and often generous inclusion into the ambit of governmentality. Is there then a strategic use of illegality and violence here, on the terrain of political society, that has led one internationally acclaimed writer to describe Indian democracy, not very sympathetically, as "a million mutinies now"? I don't have a good answer. However, an insightful recent study of this question has been published by Thomas Blom Hansen on the Shiv Sena in Mumbai. Aditya Nigam has also published some recent papers dealing with the "underground" of civil society. For the moment, I can only refer you to these works.[14]

I have used examples from only one small region of India. That is because it is the region I know best. It is also a region where, I think, political society has taken a distinct form within the evolving popular culture of democratic politics. In the light of that experience, I have tried to think about some of the conditions in which the functions of governmentality can create conditions not for a contraction but rather an expansion of democratic political participation. It is not insignificant that India is the only major democracy in the world where electoral participation has continued to increase in recent years and is actually increasing faster among the poor, the minorities, and the disadvantaged population groups. There is also some recent evidence of a fall in participation among the rich and the urban middle classes.[15] This suggests a very different political response to the facts of governmentality than in most Western democracies.

I have also not said anything here about gender. Fortunately, this is a subject on which there is a flourishing and sophisticated literature in the context of Indian democracy.[16] Interestingly, it is often the darker side of political society that is at issue here. There was, for instance, a spate of progressive legislation in the 1980s, advocated by women's groups and quickly adopted by parliament, to ensure greater rights for women. The question has now been raised if this was not a success won too easily, by legislative action from the top, because the actual lives of most women are still led in families and communities where everyday practices are regulated not by the law but by other authorities. The question has been raised if the rights of women in minority communities are best furthered by state legislation that might even violate minority rights, or whether the only viable road is the slow and painstaking one of trying to change beliefs and practices within the minority communities themselves. A proposal to reserve a third of the seats in parliament for women has been recently stalled by the vociferous opposition of backward caste leaders who have alleged that it would whittle away their hard-earned representation and substitute it by upper-caste women legislators. In this, as in many other issues concerning women's rights, one can discern the inescapable conflict between the enlightened desires of civil society and the messy, contentious, and often unpalatable concerns of political society.

I conclude by reminding my readers of the founding moment of the political theory of democracy in ancient Greece. Centuries before either civil society or liberalism was invented, Aristotle had concluded that not all persons were fit to become part of the governing class because not everyone had the necessary practical wisdom or ethical virtue. But his shrewd empirical mind did not rule out the possibility that in some societies, for some kinds of people, under some conditions, democracy might be a good form of government. Our political theory today does not accept Aristotle's criteria of the ideal constitution. But our actual governmental practices are still based on the premise that not everyone can govern. What I have tried to show is that alongside the abstract promise of popular sovereignty, people in most of the world are devising new ways in which they can choose how they should be governed. Many of the forms of political society I have described would not, I suspect, meet with Aristotle's approval,

because they would appear to him to allow popular leaders to take precedence over the law. But we might, I think, be able to persuade him that in this way the people are learning, and forcing their governors to learn, how they would prefer to be governed. That, the wise Greek might agree, is a good ethical justification for democracy.

PART   II

GLOBAL/LOCAL:
Before and After September 11