

Chapter – II

FORMATION OF INDIAN STATE: AN OVERVIEW

The basis of being India a 'State' in the Western sense of the term with distinctive political boundary has been of recent origin. The inherent implication lies in the fact that unlike state formation in Europe, Indian State formation has a distinctive history to be traced in her traditional and primordial relationships between different centres of power assimilation charged by religious affiliations. One may look back to the basis of Indian civilisation and can well find the nexus between secular authorities and the Brahamanic Hindu religious elites to have the political legitimation in a particular political arena called 'Rajya'. While the political arena in India was characterised by a relatively high level of symbolic and organisational distinctiveness and imbued with strong universal if not universalistic orientations, its sanctity was derivative¹. Thus any attempt to separate the 'secular' aspect to kingship from the 'religious' is to misrepresent the nature of Hindu Social reality. Indeed, the documented social and political history of India proves beyond doubt that the primary stage of politico-civic formation in India under the Hindu Kings did experience the development within India a concept and practice of sovereignty,

which emphasised the multiple rights of different groups and sections of society without the existence of a Unitary concept of State. Concomitantly, a rather specific combination of a tendency to civilisational, universal or imperial expansion with such fractured sovereignty (Rajyas) emerged². Above all in the ancient period India did not experience with any supreme autonomous political centre with strong imperial orientations, such was the experience, barring some exceptions, of both the ancient and medieval Indian history. A quick search of the ancient and the medieval history of India may not be out of place to mention.

Indeed, the term, 'India' as a conceptual frame derived out of the development of Hindu civilisation. This does not however, necessarily mean India had no existence before the formation of Hindu civilisation, ^{As} the breeder of the term India would simply mean that 'India' as a conscious centre had been the achievement of Hinduism after the great assimilation of Aryan Dravidian civilisations³. Before this, civilised communities had been in existence in different parts of Indian geography in isolated manner. The early Hindus should be credited for their contribution to the creation of one civilisation and social structure out of the variegated attributes of population scattered within the Indian geography. The reference of pre-Hindu civilisation had come to the light only after the excavation in the Indus valley. However, the documented history has still been silent to describe how did the Pre-Aryan

culture merge with the Aryans⁴. The assumed history suggests us that the nomadic Aryans had come to India as non violent-peaceful emigrants. But ultimately had come into conflict with the local people, defeated them and established their authority⁵.

With the expansion of the territorial authority the Aryan chieftains had converted them into kings. The expansion of the Aryan settlement in the Indo-gangetic plains did rise a powerful monarchy under the king-ship of Bharatas⁶. In fact one can have a documented history of the Bharata king Sudas. Indeed, Sudas had subordinated ten kings of earlier Aryan settlements in the battle field. Sudas was designated as paramount king and the powerful supra-sovereign feature had come into existence. The dig-vijayas of later times which left the local rulers undisturbed was the logical out come of the theory of the paramount king-the Samrat⁷. Thus the frequent use of the terms Adhiraja, Rajadhiraja, Samrat, Ekkrat etc. and the repeated references to such sacrifices as the Asvamedha, Rajasuya, Vajapeya, show that the idea of universal conquest was a familiar concept to the ancient monarchs and political thinkers⁸.

The 6th century B.C. provided a vacuum owing to the absence of a kind of central political force that could tie up the whole Indian political territory. Kingdoms of various sizes were in constant competition, resulting in a large number of small independent political units. Such a segmented nature of the political collectivities

in India added to the fluidity and instability of the political structure⁹. Such kinds of structures were almost politically vulnerable and the circumstances can be compared with the situation prevalent in Europe throughout the middle ages and the early modern period. However, there have been fundamental differences too. Firstly, in Europe the ideal of political unification manifest in the establishment of Holy Roman Empire, the ideal ultimately transformed into the modern nation states. Such an ideal was very weak in India because of the reason that Indian civilisation has never been defined in political terms¹⁰. The ruler-subject relationship in India was never based on sanctification of political activities. Second, political activities in India had a combination of transcendental orientation with a mundane perspective. Moreover, until modern times India did never experience with wars of religion. Above all, the pre-modern India is devoid of the experience of institutionalising religious force for a greater unified political solidarity.

Of all the states that developed in the 6th century B.C. the Magadha Kingdom was the first of its kind to establish its supremacy over the small kingdoms. During the reigns of Bimbisara and Ajantasatru the political boundary of Magadha was extended to the whole northern India. Indeed the Kings of Magadha had been able to make a strong political centre. This large political centre had

been reigned by a series of kings belonging to different dynasties starting from the Haryanka, Sisunaga, Nandea and the Mauryas¹¹.

In fact during the rule of the Mauryas the Magadha kingdom had further extended its political boundary embracing almost the whole of India. But the undefended and insecured frontier of the North West helped the foreign invaders to take venture of intrusion in India. The invasion of the Persian and the Greeks had been a significant political event of the history of Magadha political system under the Maurya rule. The great Chandragupta Maurya had been able to defend the country from the invaders and concentrated on arrangements for political unification of India by integrating the greater part of India. His empire extended upto Mysore in the south and beyond the natural boundaries of India upto the borders of Persia in the north-west¹². The post Maurya era of India witnessed the intrusion of the foreigners. Among the foreigners the great Kushana emperor Kanishka was able to extend his empire from Bihar in the east to Khorasan in the west, and from Khotan in the north to the Konkan in the south. The fall of the Kushana Empire paved the way for the many tribal and monarchical states in the north, south and western India¹³.

During the reign of the Guptas almost all the parts of India was again united. The mighty Gupta emperor Samudra Gupta extended his empire nearly the whole of Northern India and Orissa with a long stretch of territory along the eastern Coast extending as

far as south. Probably, Samudragupta had a vision of an all India empire. But realising the practical situation he gave up that idea. Samudragupta created a number of independent States and a central block of territory over which he was able to exercise his direct control. Samudragupta suppressed the disruptive tendencies of the small states and by maintaining a good relation with the frontier states of the west he developed the defensive strength of the Gupta empire against foreign enemies¹⁴. The next mighty Gupta emperor Chandragupta II extended his boundary over the whole of North India, including the maritime provinces of Gujrat and Kathiawad. Taking advantage of the death of the last mighty Gupta Emperor Skandagupta the Huns began to penetrate into India and the regional powers rose into prominence. Thus the unification of the country which was established by Samudragupta began to disintegrate¹⁵.

During Mauryan Empire and Gupta Empire, the central political leadership had created an extensive network of personal interrelationships with the traditional local leaders and depended heavily on them to secure loyalty and ensure a steady flow of resources. The political centres so developed in the Mauryan or Gupta Empire were stronger and the territorial scope of the politics was wider than that of the polities that existed before them. However, the centralising tendencies so existed did never lead to the restructuring of relations between the centre and periphery. There

were no attempts to break-through the ascriptive status of the periphery and continued to pursue the dominant caste status base in identifying the local leaders. However, policies pursued by Asoka had a mission to go beyond the existing premises but such attempts were always counteracted by coalition of various forces. Evidently it was an impossibility to achieve anything near unity of the sub-continent. Owing to this absence of any strong political tie up, both the Mauryan and the Gupta Empires had been fragmented into pieces. Kingdoms of various sizes had been developed and they were in constant competition resulting in an overall instability.¹⁶ In the midst of this competitive political culture, there had been the rise of regional political forces in different parts of India.

The Gupta Empire which lasted on and from 275 A.D. to 550 A.D., had, in fact, followed almost identical style in the process of Empire building as usually followed by the Mauryas. While administering the Empire the Gupta kings too depended on interpersonal relationship. Such relationship based on caste status consideration was usually followed in defining the centre periphery relationship. Such relationship purely based on the assumption of the central force used to be thwarted whenever there had been any signs of weakness of strong centralising force or the occasional rise of the strong regional force. During the last phase of Gupta Empire the weaknesses were revealed due to various reasons. Importantly, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled was never

considered from the politico-social and cultural angles. As a matter of fact legitimacy issue was highly questioned because of the weak political ground of political obligation. Indeed there had been no attempts of building nation and forming state-hood in the European sense of the term. Taking advantage of the situation, at the last phase of the Gupta Empire, the Hunas made so many attempts to invade. The political disunity which became manifest provided impetus to the Hunas to invade India. However, occasional Huna invasions were almost successfully prevented by the Gupta Emperors and their allies.¹⁷

The consecutive attempts of the Hunas to invade Gupta Empire created a kind of psychological boost in the minds of the rising regional powers that started considering that it was not an impossibility to strike the edifice of the Gupta paramountcy in India. In different corners i.e. from North to South and West to East the regional powers gradually proved themselves as surrounding force defying the authority and control of the Gupta Empire on them. Indeed, the emergence of the regional forces in different corners of India had, ultimately, put the last nail to the coffin of the Gupta Empire. The decadence of Gupta Empire witnessed the rise of number of regional powers, although regionally strong, but devoid of any attributes to create a greater all India structure and nationalist upsurge. In this sense, political disunity in India had been the rule of the game.

A succinct description of the different regional forces which emerged during the period is not out of place to mention. From the relics of the Gupta Empire there emerged three strong forces settling on a strong political basis in three distinctive regions. The northern regional force established by Harshabardhana, whereas in the east Sasanka established a strong Kingdom and in the south there had been the supremacy of the Chalukyas led by Pulkeshin II¹⁸. All these three regional forces had the distinctiveness to be qualified as strong regional power integrating and subjecting and overpowering the small powers of the respective regions. The regional forces had their distinctive culture, linguistic and ethnological foundations. Despite attempts of these regional forces to subjugate each other cutting across the regional geographical, cultural and ethno-linguistic boundaries, there have been no reflections in the documented Indian History that either of these regional forces could make a greater Indian Empire building. Thus throughout the period of existence of regional power blocks in India, the realization of the ideas of Indian political unity with a distinctive political boundary of her own did remain a far cry.

By exercising the capacity of being a great warrior Harshavardhana could prove himself the most powerful ruler of northern India. He proved his supremacy by overpowering and subjugating Valabhi, Gujrat and a part of Malwas. After establishing his complete domination over northern India

Harshavardhana wanted to extend his kingdom firstly to the east and then to the south, with the intention to overpower the rising eastern power led by Sasanka and take revenge of his brother's assassination, Harshavardhana invaded Sasanka's kingdom. However, his attempt was not completely successful and he could not subjugate Sasanka till his death. After the death of Sasanka, Harshavardhana extended his political boundary by integrating Punjab, Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. With the ambition to overpower the southern king Pulakesin II Harshavardhana had invaded the southern kingdom but ultimately had to retreat because of strong combat from Pulkeshin II¹⁹.

Turning to the south, Pulkeshin II rose into prominence. He overpowered and subjugated the neighbouring state and had an intention to extend his authority to the far south. His success was in his victory over the Pallavs. However, ultimately Pulkeshin II was assassinated by Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, and Pallavas rose into prominence in the south. In the southern part of the Pennas and the Tungabhadra, the Pallavas were able to build up a strong regional power. They were also able to spread their authority over the Ceylon for the time being. Simultaneously, in the far south the Cholas built an empire. The Chola king Rajaraja conquered many territories and made himself the master of the south. With a

powerful navy he was able to conquer Ceylon and Malaya. With the help of the naval power the Cholas made the Bay-of Bengal as a "Chola Lake" for the time being²⁰.

In the east the strong regional political force represented by Sasanka. Sasanka was able in subjugating the chiefs of Midnapore, Orissa, Kangod etc. Sasanka was the first Bengalee Emperor who mooted the idea of a Bengalee empire and this idea was successful during his lifetime. The idea of Bengalee empire of Sasanka came to an end with his death and the political conditions of Bengal was one of disorder and confusions and Bengal was divided into five principalities.²¹ The establishment of the Pala Dynasty by Gopala in the middle of the 8th century A.D. marks the removal of lawlessness and disorder from the country. The Empire established by Gopala reached its supremacy under Dharmapala and the Bengali Empire continued by the later Pala and Sena rulers. The last Sena is Lakshmana Sena was overthrown by the Muslims invaders in the year 1206 A.D. Simultaneously the Muslims also had overthrown the Rajput chiefs from the Northern India and occupied Delhi and gradually created the condition of establishing the Sultanate Empire centering Delhi as its capital. For the first forty years the Emperors and Empress of the Sultanate dynasty had to keep themselves busy to fight out the internal feuds. The overpowerment of Sultana Rajia by her close inmates had ultimately paved the way

for the Khaljis to occupy the Delhi Sultanate. Among the Khalji Sultans, Alauddin Khalji could extend the political boundary of the Sultanate towards both northern and southern India by overpowering the local and regional forces. However, during his time too the political relationship between the centre and the periphery was mostly depended on muscle power based on dominant-dominated relationship. After the end of the Khalji dynasty the ever-biggest Sultanate controlled political territory began to crumble. The Tughluq Sultans did not able to extend the boundary made by the Khalji Sultans.²² The Sultanate dynasty had been ultimately thrown to the oblivion only after the Sayids and the Lodis. The first was at Panipath had ultimately given birth to a kind of Muslim rule in India fundamentally different from the previous rulers. The re-unification of the political map of India under a single central system had gradually been developed of a century by the Emperors.

The Mughal period was an improvement upon that of the period of the Sultanate because the Mughal emperors introduced a conciliatory policy of governance. The Mughal system of administration with all power concentrated in the hands of the emperor was well organised. The Mughal administration has been called "the Perso-Arabic system in Indian setting". Sir Jadunath Sarkar observes, "the principles of the Mughal Government, their

Church policy, their rules of taxation, their departmental arrangement and the very titles to their officials were imported from outside India.²³ The Mughal empire gave political unity to the whole of Northern India and a large of the Dakhin by bringing practically the entire subcontinent of India, except the far south, under the Central Government and giving it a centralised unitary system of administration. All the twenty Mughal provinces had the same system of administration, the one official language, official titles and the same administrative measures. This created a feeling of oneness of the country and made people of one province feel at home in another province.²⁴

On the other side, the Mughal Government was a military occupation of the land and it retained this character till the end.²⁵ The Mughal emperors established powerful garrison in strategic places to overawe the people and keep them in check. It is unfortunate that the Mughal government continued to be in ~~military~~ occupation of the land and performed the duties of ~~maintenance~~ of internal and external peace and the collection of revenue. The Mughal Government failed to perform any kind of ~~social~~ duties and it failed to take any measure for the advancement of the physical, intellectual and moral welfare of the people. The greatest failing of the Mughal lays in a deliberate attempt to keep the Hindus and the Muslims perpetually divided with an exception

of the attempt of Akbar for homogeneity which lasted only for twenty five years.²⁶

Indeed until 1286 Indian Empire or attempts of Empire building were in no way defined in political terms. Most of the Empires so far noted had a cosmological vision but did not necessarily lead to overall sanctification of political activities. Such attempts had a different type of impact on the political dynamics of India. There was no conception of absolutist state and there had been no wars of religion as experienced by Europe during those days.²⁷ The reform movements in ancient and medieval India were anti Brahminical and generally turned their wrath against the social structure and in large part refrained from being political. Admittedly Empires were never treated to be the authority for appeal against structural justice, inequalities, irrationalities of the social process. Empires were short lived to be responsible for any social misdeed.²⁸ Thus the European model of State had been absent in India and the so-called Indian State, if there was any, was never taken into consideration as a social adjudicator. Thus until 1206, theoretically there had been no state in India rather there had been the experiences of the rise of so many Empires used to be tied up by primordial relationship and the primitive theory of force. Indeed there had been no attempt to build institutions for a greater political tie up to be called in the European sense a nation state.²⁹

The Sultanate regime and the Mughal regime had, in fact, largely preoccupied a considerable period of time of the medieval, political history of India and could reign over the Hindi heartland over a long period of time. Some historians have been enthusiastic to call specially the Mughal period of India's real political unification³⁰. Notwithstanding the fact that barring some regions the Mughals could establish their political foot-print on the entire Indian landmass. As a result of such an unprecedented growth of empire in India, one may well argue that the basis of India's political unification was made complete. But such a pre-conceived notion may seem to be over-statement. If some one argues on the Mughal empire building, one has to take it for granted that the basis of integration of Mughal regime was primarily based on force and military power and certainly not on legitimacy of the people. Thus the implied force of politics in Mughal political power was primarily absent. Such an argument can well justify any situation during Mughal regime whenever and wherever there had been military weakness, there had been the witness of the fall of control of the Mughal regime over the area. Thus the authority-subject relationship was never based on any justified grounds, rather it was based on the unilateral relationship between the ruler and the ruled. As a matter of fact there had been no in built nationalist

awakening in India owing to the lack of institutional forces and factors supposed to be engineered and organised by the Mughal rulers. There could have been some sectoral improvements by the personal benevolence of some Mughal emperors, but there had been no concerted action programme in their hands to tighten the basis of nationalist state in India. The policies of the emperors especially Akbar in deconcentrating the administration through the system of Munsabdars had never been treated to be a departure in the nature of governance of different units of the empire. There had been no attempt to decentralize the unilateral centrifuged system of administration built by the Mughal emperors. Moreover, the entire period of Mughal regime did never experience with the organised revival of any subjective or objective forces of national unity. Since the term 'Nationalism in India' had been objectively absent during Mughal regime, any attempt of the historians to terminolise the Mughal period as the age of India's national unification would simply prove to be a venture to create a false consciousness on the issue and may produce a subjective feeling of nostalgia.

An honest search for identifying the location and nature of a nation state in India would prompt us to co-relate Indian experience with the experiences of the nationalist state formation in Europe. There has always been the possibility of errors to make such a

comparative historical analysis unless the historicity of both India and Europe is not properly understood. Such an honest analysis is urgently called for certainly not on a comparative scale but definitely on a scale at the microcosm.

The factors and forces mostly responsible for evolving nationalist state system in Europe during medieval period had been completely absent in the medieval Indian scenario. Feudalism in Europe at its matured stage joined hands with religious, social and economic institutional forces to give birth to the states with concerted nationalist feeling. Such kind of nexus between the socio economic and religious institutions and the feudal lords glorified as king or emperor was not the experience of the people of Indian sub continents. Indeed the evolution of Indian nation state has been the indirect gift of British imperialism in India. It was indeed an anti imperial unity resulted through various subjective and objective forces of nationalism had ultimately provided a formal shape of Indian national state. Thus, to sum up, before the Britishers established their Raj in India, the established and imposed political culture of India down through ages had always revealed a kind of Rajya. (at the regional scale) and Samrajya' (at the cross regional scale) which had never been tantamount with the concept of European state as a legal and political unity.

Historically speaking India had never been a united country in the political sphere. This disunion over through ages facilitated

foreign invasion and the political subjugation of the country to the British. Despite repeated attempts by the British through statutes and administrative reforms it was not possible to present a unified India even during the time of transfer of power. There had been two Indias represented through the directly administered British provinces and nearly six hundred Indian Princely States. Integrating these two Indias under a single political umbrella had been stupendous task. Since there had been no unanimity behind the formation of the State, the newly emerged Indian Statecraft had to face dissensions and discontent while integrating the Princely States within its fold. At the time of merger the Princely States had different levels of institutional developments, particularly, Princely States had no experience with political parties, representative institutions, democratic elections and other attributes of modern state politics, on the other hand the directly administered British provinces had been acquainted with all these experiences. Moreover, the Princely State displayed different level of socio-economic development and specialised and diversified experiences of society, economy and polity formation. These Indian States were generally looked upon as backward compared to the advanced level of development in British India. The Princely States had smaller areas for political activity with a much greater territorial fragmentation (with the exception of few big States like Hyderabad,

Mysore and Jammu and Kashmir). Furthermore, a different social structure existed in most of the Princely States. The rulers themselves were at the apex of the political and social structure which they did not want to lose. Such a generalised presumption would lead us to understand the Princely State Cooch Behar within its specified perspectives. The Cooch Behar State should not be viewed as a principality with certain common identifiable features of the majority of the Princely States of India, rather the Cooch Behar State has to be viewed from the perspective of north east India because of its geographical proximity with the north-eastern states and its age old socio-cultural and ethnic linkages with the north-east. A thorough study in an incisive manner on Cooch Behar State in the north-eastern backdrop would help us to understand the inherent positive currents and counter currents in integrating Cooch Behar with newly independent India.

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