

Chapter I: Introduction

The Emergence of the State and Other Issues

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to give an account of the origin of the state as a social and political structure in human civilization in India and the West. Other related issues will also be attended to. The term “state” is a loaded one. It carries on its back a few centuries of varied use and purpose. It owes its origin to particular thread of circumstances in history, inciting the speaker and the hearer to make normative judgments. The issue of the state is at the heart of the history of political thought in the modern world. It may be noted that most of human history has not been graced by the presence of states. From fossil records, it has been found that the first really recognizable state appeared in Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C¹. In India, it was not until the Nandas and the Mauryyas when there was the imperial state and Kautilya’s *Arthasāstra*² speaks of the existence of kingdoms and lays down principles for the consolidation of the king’s authority. The discovery of the *Arthasāstra* was a form of exoneration of the charge that the Indian society was unconcerned with political relationships. Archeological findings at Harappa and Mahenjadarō, however, provide evidence for trade and growth of towns - an evidence of existence of polity.

I

Varṇa or class is a basic political factor in the Indian context. Kingship or monarchy, which was the normal form of ancient Indian polity may be said to have its origin to the caste system, ruling being a caste function assigned to the *kṣatriya* or warrior class. In the code of Vishnu we find the King is enjoined “to keep the four castes and the four orders in the practice of their several duties”.³ The early Hindu literature casts light on the purpose of the origin of the state and government. It elaborates a theory of man’s decline and progressive loss of virtues until he lives in the most evil age, *Kali Yuga*. Thus, the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* says: “Now the sinful Kali Age is upon them when dharma is destroyed,

an Age full of evil customs and deceit”.⁴ Accordingly government became necessary for the protection of the *dharma* as a form of divine aid to struggling humanity. The ancient code of Brhaspati explains: “In former ages men were strictly virtuous and devoid of mischievous propensities. Now that avarice and malice have taken possession of them, judicial proceedings have been established”.⁵ Judicial proceedings can be instituted only by a king with the help of his Brahmin priest.

Some studies of Indian political thought explain kingship in a way which seems to be modeled on the social contract theories.⁶ The king is himself bound to rule by the principles of *dharma*, and since the citizens have a corresponding duty to obey the king’s edicts and support his administration, there is an implied social covenant. In some sources, the covenant theory is set forth more specifically. The *Mahābhārata* tells of men, living in a state of social chaos, approach the God Brahma and request the appointment of a king. Brahma then suggests Manu, but the latter agrees to serve only after the people guarantee to respect his rule.⁷ An early Buddhist account in the *Dīghanikāya* refers to a definite contract between an elected king and his people.⁸ According to Kautilya: “ People suffering from anarchy, as illustrated by the proverbial tendency of a large fish swallowing a small one, first elected Manu ... to be their king ...”⁹ Referring to this, historian R.P. Sharma says: “Underlying every concept of kingship was the doctrine of *mātsyanyāya*– the analogy of the big fish eating the little fish”.¹⁰ The Indian political tradition has its beginning in the oldest Hindu literature – the Vedic *Samhitās* and undergoes centuries of exposition, interpretation and revision in the literary epics, legal codes, and political texts before the Christian Era.

It is difficult to isolate political ideas in ancient India from the sea of philosophy and myths in which they are buried. Perhaps this situation is excusable since even scholars have begun to open up the vast treasures of ancient Indian thought and since the Indian political thought cannot be isolated

from the main body of Hindu philosophy. According to some historians, property, family, tribe, caste, religion and land systems contributed to the formation of political ideas and institutions in early India. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant idea was that Indian life has always been dominated by philosophy, mysticism, asceticism and world renouncing religions, and had done little in developing the idea of the state or practical political institutions. This is a very one-sided point of view. Since the late Vedic period (about 600 B.C.), Indian thought had been dominated by the idea of the *tri-varga* – the aims of human life. These are *dharma*, religious and moral duties, *artha*, practical affairs of life, and *kāma*, enjoyment of life. India has been successful in keeping these elements of life in balance. One reason for the exaggerated emphasis which is often placed upon the spiritual element in Indian life is the fact that the only literature which has been preserved from the first thousand years or so of Indian history is almost entirely religious. The discovery of the work of Kautilya gave a corrective to this one-sided view.

As our purpose here is not primarily to describe the historical origins and development of the political institution of the state or kingship, we give but a brief outline or sketch of the matter. We now pass over to some non-Hindu doctrines.

In the Islamic culture polity was transient and attracted the name, “cyclical state”.¹¹ States came and went, and were of larger or smaller size at various periods; but they never lasted long enough ever to be rationalized at all. The fear of tribesmen meant putting larger premium on military power than the urban strata. In Muslim society war remained the greatest potential source of profit as opposed to profit from land. While in Europe, the reasonably settled character of the state forced monarchs to provide infrastructural facilities and services to gain revenue, Muslim society did not have a multi-polar state system equivalent to that of Europe. In summary, the cyclical state in Islam was unstable, arbitrary and predatory enough to interfere directly with the working of justice and

autonomy of society. The government was weak and few services could be provided by the state.

Classical social scientists in the West have essentially evolutionary views about the origin of state. The state arose when a certain way of life is replaced by another, say, when the hunter-gatherer way of life is replaced by the intervention of agriculture, or when progression from band/herd to community living took place, or when there was a transition from the state of nature to civil society, necessitating the fulfillment of certain common purposes.¹² This is the view of the political liberals in the West and the classical statement of this is found in John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*.¹³ Marxism sees the emergence of the state as due to the birth of class in human history. If both these theories can be termed societal theories, a third group of thinking has attributed the origin of the state to the unsettling of a settled population by an external invasion. This view is dubbed as realism, and finds its supporters in Oppenheimer¹⁴ and Max Weber¹⁵ among others. In view of the points stated above, we may say that there are three theories regarding our understanding of the state. Any understanding of the state involves taking note of two things: (i) state is a force within society and (ii) state as a social actor in external interactions with a larger world. We shall discuss these three theories in some details. While examining them in turn, we shall pay particular attention to their views of the state in terms of the two points stated above.

Liberalism holds the individual to be the seat of moral worth.¹⁶ A notable liberal thinker is Adam Smith who in the third book of *Wealth of Nations*¹⁷ describes the manner in which spread of commerce gave birth to the autonomous and productive city whose economic impact in undermining the feudal power was great. A decent political system came into existence by replacing naked power with economic growth. Smith envisages that a certain type of state, a minimalist "night-watchman" ensures peace, easy taxes and a tolerant administration of justice. Thus, for Smith, in the causal chain of social development Capitalism is instrumental to the development of the liberal state.

One of the sophisticated liberal thinkers is Immanuel Kant. His “Perpetual Peace”¹⁸ is characterized by a remarkable realism. He accepted that the State, seen in the background of European international relations, was a necessary instrument of security, but he nevertheless produced a plan to encourage peace. Peace would follow if states had liberal governments, opened themselves to outsiders and encouraged trade with other similar states in a liberal league. Such a state of affairs would encourage peace because war-killing and trade, destroyed by war, would restrain governments. It was the last of Kant’s ideas, concerning the pacific tendencies of international trade, which came to dominate liberalism in the nineteenth century. Kant links his liberal political ideas with his ethical theory. As a prophet of peace, Kant speaks about the ethical criteria of political measure and the moral obligation to seek and preserve peace. Politics is an empirical discipline. It is the art of the empirically possible. Ethics is the science of what is morally necessary. Thus, ethics should take precedence over politics. Kant relies on two principles: the first is the ethical principle of categorical imperative which enjoins us to respect human beings as ends in themselves; the second is the legal principle which underlies the domain of government that men ought to and as rational beings do seek to extend the rule of law. Thus, for Kant, the political analogue of the realm of ends is a republic. In a republic laws are self-imposed and the rights and interests of men will be honoured. Thus, Kant sees the moral law and its political corollary as the key to international peace.

Kant wants to translate the moral law into the language of positive law and politics. Kant’s context was that of war and peace which is not our direct concern. Yet, he makes certain very important suggestions which are relevant for our purpose. One such suggestion is that the state is not the geographical occupation of a site. It is a society of men, who no one else has a right to command except the state itself. In a state there should be priority of the ethical over the political. It is, however, not expected that kings should philosophies or

philosophers should become kings. But kings or king-like people should let philosophers speak openly and not remain silent. This is indispensable for the business of government. It is a point to remember that morality is the theoretical doctrine and politics is the practical doctrine of right and there is no conflict between theory and practice.

Advocates of liberal democratic state took the individual and his interest as the touchstone. "The people" were less a collectivity than a collection of unique individuals who required means to pursue their free choices with as little interferences from the state as possible. The Basis of Marx and Engels' theory of state is a rejection of the notion that one starts from an analysis of the individual and his or her relation to the state. "It is not the single isolated individual who is active in historical and political processes, but rather human beings who live in definite relations with others and whose nature is defined through these relations".¹⁹ For Marx and Engels the state embodies the interest of the dominant class; the rules that it produces correspondingly serve the interest of some rather than all of the people. The view that the state is an instrument of class rule can be assimilated to economic reductionism that "the economic base determines the struggle for state power as well as the institutional form of the state".²⁰

Marx and Engels were generally, if not always, alert to the difficulties of simple reductionist or instrumentalist theories of the state, and offered numerous qualifications which indicate that the correspondence between the base and the super-structure was not straightforwardly linear or mechanistic. These qualifications indicate a second approach to the relationship between classes and the State to that found in the *Communist Manifesto* or the *German Ideology*. This approach, according to most interpreters, is found in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.²¹ It sees the state as possessing a measure of independent power and not as necessarily linked to the interests of the dominant class.

It is, however, not clear whether such a reading is to be regarded as "exceptional" or as a more regular feature of capitalist democracy. There is no definite resolution to this uncertainty for, in their works Marx and Engels do not

provide a coherent abstract definition of the state of the kind found in their conception of the capitalist economy (e.g., commodity or value). It has been suggested by N.Harding²² that in Marx's writings can be found two conceptions of socialism which are associated with two contrary models of the state. The self-governing commune belongs to Marx's earlier phase when his view of socialism was centered on the necessity to overcome alienation through the transformation of the patterns of authority within society. In this view, the state, along with private ownership of productive property, was a major source of man's alienation, comprised as it was of separate bodies of armed men standing outside and above society. Its abolition would involve the abolition of standing army, the police and the judiciary, whose functions were to be appropriated by the people in arms. In place of bureaucratic interests that sustain state exploitation of society, there would be communes in which people would directly make and implement decisions, and would take responsibility not only for legislation and executive decisions but also for judicial, policing and defensive functions. Thus, although Marx stressed that class conflict would eventually allow for the "withering away of the state" – the advocacy of a powerful interventionist State was the culmination of Marx's critique of the liberal view that economic life was the non-political preserve of the individual. On the contrary, Marx argued that socially useful production was the sole purpose of politics and the state, and did not constitute a separate sphere. It required a directing and efficiently administered state for the maximisation of production with the goal of creating a modern industrial but socialistic society that was characterised less by communal populism or industrial democracy than by a disciplined work force accepting managerial and state directives.

However, N. Harding points out that this model became contrary to the aims of the mature Marx who, in his later writing, regarded the state as having a much more activist role in building socialism. Socialism was viewed not on the communal model by increasingly as overcoming material want rather than human alienation. The need for the transformation of property relations to

end exploitation and to provide for the economic needs of all required not a weaker but a stronger state. The dislocations and deprivations of unregulated capitalist production could not be transformed without state ownership and control of the means of production. This would secure the twin goals of rational planning and equitable distribution. Moreover, 'a dictatorship of the proletariat' would be required to combat the inevitable resistance from the propertied classes. The second model of the state in Marx legitimises a strong state in the service of economic production and material consumption.

Realists insist that the presence of a state allows for peace in social relations within society. The provision of orders, that is, prevention of predation and terror for security reasons, is the prime task of the state. Peace is necessary in order that production, exchange and property could then follow. A stronger state presence is required for security reasons, to establish order and to create the proper human material without which modernisation is impossible.²³ The fundamental insight of the whole school is that the international system is anarchic and the relations among the states are fundamentally competitive. Hence a state must try and calculate the intentions of other States. The search for security by a State means that, in a system of states, it will seek to play balance of power politics. Thus, the United States sought to protect China, then a weak state from being swallowed up by Japan, during the courses of events of 1930's to preserve the balance of power. Again, it is natural to expect, for example, an area of weak states to stand between those which are more powerful to help warn of military attack. It is thus normal for both Israel and Syria to find contemporary Lebanon to their advantage.

Realists stress that power of a state is very closely related to its wealth. A state's drive for industrialization is largely for reasons of its military security. To maximise the former is to gain the latter and consequently power. Naturally, realists will not accept the notions of abolishing the state, for it can lead to a reversion to chaos and rule of jungle.

II

As for the question how to define a state we do not get much clue in the context of ancient political state of affairs as there was no mention of state in the proper sense of the term in the early Vedic literature. There were only tribal organisations, folk assemblies and communal institutions with rudimentary administrative set up. In post-Vedic times, beginning about 600 B.C. there began to be well-organised tribal republics and some of the elements that went into the making of *saptāṅga* theory. We find a discussion of the earliest definition of state – the *saptāṅga* theory, which was first given in the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya probably valid for the period of the Maurya Empire [321-184 B.C.], although elements of the theory, as just stated already goes back to 600 B.C. The seven limbs of the definition are the master (monarch), officials, people, fortified capital, treasury, army and friend (allies)²⁴. Besides, the qualifications for kingship, the methods of selection and the question of succession: the various ministers and councils which served the king; “the rule of law” centering largely around the concept of *dharma* and almost the equally important concept of *danḍa* (force or punishment or war) which made the diplomacy of ancient India “a curious mixture of supremely high ethical principles with treachery, deceit and calculated ruthlessness; remarkable theory of *maṇḍala*, which is described as a theory of inter-state relations which hold that a kingdom is an ally or enemy with respect to its geographical position and with respect to the intending conquer”²⁵ and which has been referred to as the Hindu theory of balance of power. There is also the much-debated question of the prevalence of the “republican” forms of government.²⁶ There were, it is true, evidences of the so-called republics or *ganas* and this has been treated as the evidence of a democratic tradition in India.²⁷

There had been different attempts at understanding and interpretations of ancient Indian history from the later eighteenth century onwards first by the Orientalists or Indologists followed by generations of historians who were writing under the impact of the national movement.²⁸ So there were the opposite

trends of debasement or a glorification of political ideas. The clearly nationalistic historians writing in the 1920's, and 1930's showed an "unashamed" glorification of the ancient Indian past, perhaps as a compensation for the humiliating present, and also wrote in conscious opposition to the earlier writings, particularly, James Stuart Mill's *History of British India*(1817). Hence, the frequent comparisons of the *Arthśāstra* with the writings of Machiavelli and the ideas of Bismarck or for that matter the comparison of the *mantriparisad* as described by Kautilya with the Privy Council of Britain, and the suggestion that the Kautilyan monarch was similar to the Constitutional monarch of Britain.²⁹ However, it can be said with some degree of confidence that monarchy was the normal form of government in ancient Hindu state. *Rājan* was a familiar expression.

Even though there are divergences among theorists regarding the origin of the state, there is a great deal of agreement among them as to how the state should be defined. A composite definition would include three essentials:

1. The state is a set of institutions. These are manned by the state's own personnel. The state's most important feature is (a) the authority to lay commands and prohibitions on its people. These are backed up by the threat of coercion in such a way that decisions can be enforced.
2. The institutions of the state are at the center of a geographically bounded territory, and
3. The state monopolises rule-making within its territory.

The above definition is conceived as a general characterization of a state. Although it reveals that the state is at once institutional and functional, yet this linkage can be disrupted. In the early European Middle Ages many governmental functions – the provision of order, the rule of war and provision for justice – were provided by the church, rather than the state which existed within its boundaries. In India, Kings were recognized as individuals rather than as representatives of longer-lasting states. The state was custodial and the king

had no other duty than that of protecting the state. The *Manusmṛiti* shows *Brāhmaṇas* as priests providing laws to organize every aspect of the social life bringing peace and ensuring order. Again, not all societies have been controlled by a state; Latin Christendom was never controlled by a single state. We may, in this way, find each proposition in the stated definition as having certain limitations and the word 'tends' or 'aspires to' could be appended to virtually every statement in the definition. The state boundary was not always well-defined. It was often fuzzy and a free for all state of affairs, a feature which vitiates some states even to-day. However, this definition, usually true of states in the West at the turn of the twentieth century, remains true of the modern state as well. The modern state developed in Europe in close alliance with the rise of Capitalism and the breakthrough in industrialization.

The conception of state that emerges is that of a symbol of power, that is humanly created (not divinely ordained), and distinct from other social powers and office-holders entailing relation of power and obedience although with a space for certain public rights, e.g., citizenship, the right to vote etc. The modern state has clear territorial boundaries which in previous eras had been indefinite, porous and fluctuating. The modern state is associated with the formation of elaborate military and national police forces. When it is a nation-state, that is a state with a single culture, integration is brought about by very precise administrative boundaries within which it operates as the exclusive sources of rules (laws). The modern-nation state is characterized by a unitary sovereignty which becomes manifest in a single currency, unified legal system and an expanding state education system employing a single national language and literary tradition in the 'national' language which erodes cultural particularism. Although, the state comprises of many different offices wherein political business is transacted with reference to open-ended discussion and legal elaboration with representative bodies to allow for articulation of free expressed differences and constrained on executives, it is also evident that the state is formidable means of coercion, capable of external aggression and internal

repression. We may recall that the coercive power is not a monopoly of the state. Armed robbers, bullies and mafias use it too. The difference that is pointed out by D.D.Raphael is that “The state’s rules are supreme rules. That is what is meant by state sovereignty...”³⁰

III

The division of labour in a state to secure institutionalization brings along an impersonality that distinguishes the state and its autonomous bureaucracy from the rest of the society. Perhaps, this is why Marx and Engels regarded the division of labour as alienating, bureaucracy as parasitic, and as under the control of the dominant class and not as an autonomous entity. Even Emile Durkheim, who placed great store on the facilitative and emancipatory function of the state for its members, was also aware of the potential dangers to individual liberty from too powerful a state.

Such a conception tends to stress the autonomy of the state from societal goals – the state being a force within and an actor in an external interaction with the world there develops a distance between the state and the society. This point may be elucidated by consideration of the meaning of the word “society”. By society we mean the institutions and the functions of individual human beings in relation to these institutions which bring the individual in contact with other human beings. Social institutions are such institutions as family, educational organizations, religion as also the state. Yet, over the time, the state, the powering of the state, has held control over the rest of society. The functions of these other social institutions have been relegated to the state. The state now undertakes all the community functions. Society includes the family, the circle of friends and all other informal groups which are based on the bonds of kinship, neighbourhood and friendship - the intimate group, so to say. These social groups are regulated by the prescriptions and moral norms of a given society. These social groups although private in the sense of comprising all kinds of an individual’s activity also include the participation of the individual in decision making in the public affairs. This sphere of natural consciousness is deformed by

being subjected to the performance of certain specialized, technical actions directed by decision makers and managers. There has been an extensive proliferation of the function of the state and of large corporate monopolies in the field of production and consumption. Another sign of the erosion of social life is a reduction in public inter-action. In pre-industrial society, collective life took place in complex social communities. Now it takes the form of a specialized and formalized organization. Personal inter-action and relation in the economic sphere has died out, and has been replaced by large and mute departmental stores. The social sphere provides an arena for free self-expression and auto-determination. An increase in the state's capacity devalues social interactions.

This separation of the state and the society is of a recent origin. If we look back to the Greek political state of affairs we find that Greece was divided into so many city states like Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Ionia, Megara, etc. These states had governments as diverse as democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, etc. They were militarily equipped, and many of them had written constitutions. Yet, the extensive civil and criminal laws, most sophisticated military and a hierarchical system of administration, which marks off the modern state was unknown to the Greek political framework. Further, the distinction that gradually develops between the individual and the state machinery which seeks to control rather than cooperate was unknown to the Greek mind. We may dwell on this point a little more. Plato never ignored private families in his *Republic*.³¹ They are indeed the bedrock of the entire state. But he also wants all citizen and their wives to attend communal meals organized on the Spartan model. The Greek polis was believed to be that where men had seen the collective life of their city as the essence and the meaning of their lives, had sought their glory in its public life, their rewards within it, and immortality in its memory. The state was that structure which provided an individual the opportunity for his over-all development. It is the place where the individual is equipped to perform human actions excellently, and so achieve *eudemonia*, 'happiness', 'success',

‘fulfillment’ – in other words, human well-being. Moral development and politics are interwoven. It is the polis Aristotle had in mind when he imagined the natural condition for being human to be the public life of the citizen in the city. The polis was a place open and amenable to the conduct of being human³². Hannah Arendt draws from this understanding of the polis when she says: “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence”³³. Continuing, she says: “To force people by violence”, in the Greek sense of the term, “to command rather than persuade, were pre-political ways to deal with people, characteristic of life outside the polis, of home and family life, where the household head ruled with uncontested despotic power or of life in the barbarian empires of Asia, whose despotism was frequently likened to the organization of the household”³⁴. If we follow Arendt’s analysis we find that the state is not a means to protect society; its purpose is never to sustain the life process. Mastering the necessities of life exists, that is, “household life exists for the sake of the ‘good life’ in the polis”.

There is an extensive literature on the topic state and society, their relationship and distinction. The distinction between the state and society may be said to be first theoretically articulated by Hegel and the issue of the state and society is at the heart of the post-Hegelian world. It was Hegel who forcefully made the point that the ancient polis could not be a model for the modern state. According to Hegel, society is the center of freedom, choice and individual sovereignty while the state is that wherein force and freedom, authority and individual sovereignty are completed, cancelled and transformed into a unity. The demands of freedom takes us beyond the autonomistic forms of liberalism, where the individual and his goals are of ultimate importance, and the task of society is to permit their fulfillment. This idea of the state as the criterion for all other human conditions came to exercise a powerful fascination on contemporary thinkers of diverse persuasions, namely, Marx, Weber, Scheler, Croce, Schmidt, Spencer and so on. Despite the various differences among these

authorities, their basic understanding of state and society remains remarkably consistent with Hegel's formulation. Admittedly, on Hegel's theory, the distinction between society and state parallels the distinction between the private and the public. And there is a sense in which the state grows at the expense of the society, the former forcing the latter in a defensive and losing position. For Hegel, politics is the politics of inclusivity. There is a purpose instilled in us "to pursue each historical moment of concord until the contradictions within it become visible and compelling and then to forge new and higher forms of concord which express more fully both the essence of Being and the essence of humanity"³⁵. This is how Hegel scholar William Conally explains Hegel. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel reveals that the state is the final concord where human life is presented as an utterly ordered, seamless and rational sociality, without disruptions, tensions or arenas for the creative interplay and enhancement of difference. Hegel does not imagine a harmony; his dialectics forego harmony for unity. For him society is only an inferior moment in the course of sociality as it proceeds to completion and perfection in the idea of the state. The state is the realized society where the possibility of disruption is substantial from the value of its unifying dimension, "squeezing creativity, contestability and tragedy out of the sphere of the politics"³⁶.

From what has been said, state and society are terms to be used with care and discretion and also with some amount of uncertainty. The terminological differentiation of state (*Status Publica*) and society (*Communitas*) emerges concomitantly with the breakdown of the medieval polity and the emergence of the modernity. However, recent scholarship in the West has challenged this happier version of the separation of the state from society. Albert O. Hirschman has contended that a gradual separation of the idea of the state becomes possible when "a feeling arose in the Renaissance and became a firm conviction in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century that moralizing

philosophy and religious precept could no longer be trusted with restraining the destructive passions of man”³⁷.

It is supposed that liberation occurs from the fragmentation of authority as in state and society. It leads to better techniques for discipline and order, by harnessing human passions; the institutionlisation of the insane, the sick and the criminal was to the advantage of the dominant groups within modern western society. These enable the dominant group within society to maintain their power over society at large.

Recent Indian thought may be described as an interface of tradition and modernity. It is also a phenomenon of an ancient tradition coming to self-consciousness. The Indian tradition has continued through diverse contributions such as Hindu, Buddhist and Islam. With the colonization of the Indian subcontinent by the British the traditional awareness becomes conscious of another dimension of civilized life, more dynamic in nature as the aspirations for self-rule sought to realize itself in the political domain. It was a search for cultural self-identify that manifested itself in a manner of adjustment of the tradition with the modernity of the West. The West meant primarily British, and lately, France, Italy and Germany. The British Parliamentary system was a great lure. The French ideals of liberty and fraternity provided an impetus. In the wake of nationalism Italy and Germany came handy as sources of inspiration. Naturally, there occurred a consideration of the concept of state by leading cultural figures such as M.N. Roy, Gandhi, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo or Subhas Chandra Bose.

For a colonized consciousness the idea of the state tends to be utopian in nature. The lack of justice in the political identity and existence creates the longing for an ideal state. Naturally, the concept of state adumbrated by Indian thinkers in recent times has been markedly ethical in nature. But it should be

worth noticing a fact that utopia corrects political reality, and goes a long way towards providing a regulative model for practical statecraft.

The foregoing considerations are noticeable in the following thinkers – Gandhi, Aurobindo, M.N.Roy, Tagore and to some extent in Subhas Chandra Bose. We propose to consider the political ideas of these thinkers, drawing attention to the state/society anti-thesis wherever possible.

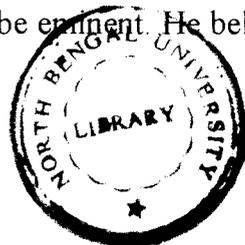
Gandhi looks upon colonisation as a form of violence, and offers us a vision of the nonviolent state based on the ethical principles of *sarvodaya*, and called it *Rāmrājya*, i.e. a society based on equity and welfare. The concept of state offered by Gandhi was non-authoritarian, non-coercive; in fact, he often speaks of the ‘withering away’ of the state. Further, his concept of state is based on the rejection of utilitarianism and base of the state is in the village unity, rather than in the cities. Instead of a centralised authoritative state Gandhi would rather advocate small self-governed units based on the virtues inherent in any good society.

Tagore’s notion of state is more social than political, and it is founded on the thesis that in India, it is *samāj*, and not the state which is the point of human unity. Therefore, he is opposed to the idea that state can be identified with the nation. As a spokesman of internationalism his is a critique of nationalism. In politics, his principles are harmony among the nations, cultures and creativity. Tagore lived in the times of national aspirations, and yet he stood for human values in politics and distinguished himself as a critique of nationalism.

Aurobindo started his career as a believer in the purification by blood and fire, and then sought to find politics on the spiritual manifestation of Godhead on the earth. His concept of history as fall from the spiritual immediacy and the gradual recovery of the lost spirituality is cyclic in nature. It is teleological in nature in so far as the goal of human unity is said to be eminent. He believed in

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the experience of a nation-soul in the manner of Hegel, and looked upon history as the manifestation of the divine in time.

M.N.Roy was initially drawn towards communism, but veered away to the political ideology of radical humanism. He rejects communism by espousing a sort of anarchy or absence of the state as a centre of political power. His notion of political paradigm is a “partyless democracy” to be brought about by a sort of renaissance.

In relation to the foregoing thinkers Bose’s thought patterns look more realistic. His psyche was mainly confined to the Indian context. Even his global perspective was mainly focused on his ultimate objective of India’s liberation. The modality of his approach was from a specific standpoint and not a world view in general like Tagore, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo or Roy. He was more concerned with the criteria of a nation’s right to self-determination. The restoration of national dignity by liberation was his primary concern. Yet he kept his noticing gaze on the political state of affairs of the world and was got drawn into it.

The views of the thinkers sketched above exist on the regulative plans rather than the constitutive plane. Tagore’s concept of harmony, Aurobindo’s idea of human unity or Gandhi’s notion of *sarvodaya* are utopias, and could be used to correct political situations. The focus is the spontaneous creative unity of individuals in the development of the state, so that the ideal state would not be a seat of power and a centre of authority and regulation, but “a kingdom of ends” in Kant’s language, a condition where morality grows from reasoned recognition that one is fulfilling an obligation to oneself and others. Here, the concept of man dominates over the concept of power. That is perhaps why the ideal of Italian nationalism was dropped when it led to fascism.

We may note further that the ideal of society, rather than the state power exercises the greater hold on the minds of recent Indian thinkers as does on the modern mind in the West. However, despite the point of contact one should not be oblivious of difference in the ontological presupposition and philosophical

anthropology of the two cultures. Yet, a comparative study wherever possible is not without its merits as it enables one to cope with the anxiety and confusion about the concepts of society and state.

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