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Review Article

Developing the state of a nation in a post-colonial world: A review essay

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Remarking on the failure of most state-making efforts in early modern Europe, Charles Tilly noted more than 30 years ago that the ‘disproportionate distribution of success and failure puts us in the unpleasant situation of dealing with an experience in which most of the cases are negative, while only the positive cases are well documented’.¹ A decade later, a well-known volume of essays on state and economic development, which appeared in the background of speculations about the ’disappearance’ of the state in the wake of alleged ‘globalisation’, populated the spread between supposed success and failure in contemporary state-building with a range of possibilities deriving essentially from relations between states, societies and transnational actors.²

² Evans, et al., Bringing the State. See especially the introduction by Skocpol (pp. 3–43), and Chs 2 and 6. Of course, since then there have been innumerable reassessments of the loci, role and relevance of the state under ‘globalisation’.

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In the two decades since, the imbalance Tilly referred to for early modern Europe has largely remained unaddressed. However, no one scanning the autopsies of post-colonial state-building in the global south would complain of a similar imbalance, even though given the monumental scale of the enterprise, the failures, however spectacular, have been relatively few. Already from the 1980s, as any traces that there had been of colonial guilt began to evaporate, fretful reticence gave way in the west to loud criticisms of post-colonial economic development and state-building strategies, in particular the supposedly wasteful, investment-intensive nature of national industrial projects, their ‘elite’ orientation, the ‘overgrown’ state (or ‘state bloat’) of industrialising societies, and the so-called ‘rent-seeking behaviour’ of states and unrepresentative state elites. When ‘structural adjustment policies’ designed under the influence of such criticisms were implemented, gloomy prognostications for the social and political stability in the south became duly self-fulfilling.

Only the fear that ‘failed states’ might pose a threat to the security of the advanced north and to global order has stimulated a reassessment in recent years of the role of the state in the south. A notable example is Francis Fukuyama’s attempt to realign the American neo-conservative platform to the southern state by making an argument for promoting its ‘strength’ to serve the cause of ‘global order’ whilst reining in its ‘scope’. According to Fukuyama, ‘weak or failed states have ... [now] become the single most important problem for international order’. Consequently, ‘how to promote governance of weak states, improve their democratic legitimacy, and strengthen self-sustaining institutions’ was ‘the central project of contemporary international politics’.

‘State-building’ is now a thriving industry among scholars and practitioners of international politics. Inevitably, recourse is taken here to readings of the past, leading to a proliferation of purportedly historical narratives of post-colonial states filtered through a ‘failed states’ perspective. This has implications not only for our understanding of the histories of ‘failure’, whatever that may mean, but also of ‘success’, which can all too easily be presumed to inhere in some essential attributes of the nation or the national project, and further serve as a source of legitimisation of particular visions of the state and its relations with society.

3 Mayall, ‘Dream of a “Quick-fix”’. ‘State bloat’ is Francis Fukuyama’s description of the phenomenon; see his State-building, p. 4. For a more nuanced and differentiated view of Third World states from the perspective of comparative political sociology, see Evans, ‘Predatory, Developmental, and other Apparatuses’.

4 Fukuyama, State-building. This exercise is typically accompanied by a disclaimer (p. 5): though apparently in theory economists who promoted liberalisation understood that the state needed to be cut back in some areas and strengthened in others, in practice the ‘relative emphasis in this period ... on reduction of state activity ... could often be confused or deliberately misconstrued as an effort to cut back state capacity across the board. The state-building agenda, which was at least as important as the state-reducing one, was not given nearly so much thought or emphasis.’

5 Ibid., pp. 92 and 99.

6 For example, Chesterman, et al., Making States Work; also Crocker, ‘Engaging Failing States’.
In general, the study of state-building projects in the post-colonial south has largely remained the province of students of politics and sociology. There have also been interventions by scholars in international law, anthropology and, even after a fashion, cultural studies. However, historians have largely been absent from such projects, leading to the danger of a loss of collective memory about the contexts, genealogies and lives of post-colonial statehood. In the absence of historical research, assessments of the post-colonial state such as those by Fukuyama risk becoming the common-sense view of our generation. We are in desperate need, therefore, of other genealogies and lives of post-colonial states that are sensitive to their individual and shared ideological, cultural, political and other imaginings, and that also take into account their encounters with the ideas, institutions and power relations of the post-war world.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the current intellectual preoccupations and priorities of its historians, this general silence about postcolonial state-building is more generally mirrored for India by the absence of historically-grounded accounts of its post-1947 transitions and transformations, with the possible exception in recent years of the Partition. The nature and extent of India’s independence was a subject of intense debate within the Communist party for several years after 1947. In the 1980s the idea that 1947 represented a discontinuity in India’s political and economic evolution was challenged by some historians, notably of the so-called Cambridge school, who were bent either upon minimising the impact of colonial rule or upon arguing that several of the major political, economic and administrative measures pursued in post-1947 India had already been initiated or anticipated by the late colonial state. Beyond this somewhat polemical context, questions of how far and in what respects 1947 represented a break from India’s colonial past have not really been a subject of any serious historical discussion. Though the nearly five decades-long silence about Partition has begun to be dispelled, we have few studies yet of its impact on politics, economy and social lives in post-1947 India.

Overwhelmingly today, in contrast to a generation or two ago, historians refuse for sound reasons to take at face value the Indian National Congress’s claim to

7 Apart from the studies cited above, see Clapham, *Africa and the International System*; and ‘ Sovereignty’. For a similar disciplinary orientation, but from a somewhat more sympathetic historically-relativistic perspective, see Ayoob, *Third World Security Predicament*, and some of the essays in Braveboy-Wagner, *Foreign Policies of the Global South*.

8 For a critical international law perspective, see Rajagopal, *International Law*; Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, offers a historically grounded political-anthropological reading of African post-colonial nation and state-building. For a cultural studies perspective on post-colonial nationalism and statehood, see Young, *Postcolonialism*. 
speak for a unitary nation in 1947, and emphasise its largely Hindu, urban, upper-caste, northern Indian character, as well as its inability to strike strong or enduring roots among the peasantry (outside a few regions), Muslims, Dalits and adivasis, and large swathes of the population in southern peninsular India. There is no dearth of insightful analyses from different perspectives of constitutional and political developments of the early post-1947 or even the more contemporary period, Indian modernity and development, the political economy of the Indian state, etc. Yet, so far as I am aware, few who regard the Congress party and its national movement to have been limited in the ways noted above at the time it took power in 1947 have attempted to explain how it came, despite Partition, to oversee the production and working of a relatively non-sectarian, innovatively liberal, and democratic constitution; negotiate or otherwise accomplish the integration of the princely states and establish the sovereignty of the Indian state over these territories; assimilate these states into a constitutional structure that was more unitary in fact than in form; establish the practices, precedents and routines vital to managing this ambivalent structure across a range of potentially divisive issues; embark on a process of planned development with all the accumulative and distributive pressures it would create along nearly every dimension; and produce and sustain the nation externally in its bid to claim sovereign nationhood. Nor has much effort gone into exploring the ways in which these challenges and processes cohered, or produced incompatibilities, conflicts, and apparent contradictions and paradoxes requiring close and frequent attempts at resolutions, compromises, adjustments to practice and discourse, and changes of course and/or discourse.

Partha Chatterjee’s notable attempt to interpret what he sees as a central concern of the post-colonial Indian state highlights rather than dispels this silence. In an essay that takes the economist Sukhamoy Chakravarthy’s lament about the technical and institutional incapacities of the planning exercise in India as a point of departure to extend his own earlier analysis of Indian nationalism to the consolidation, in largely material and class political terms, of the post-1947 Indian state, Chatterjee argues that the logic and rigours of accumulation were checked by the demands of state legitimation necessitated by the domestic context of representative democracy. Though on the face of it a mere variant of the ‘growth/equity’ trade-off that is often said to have bedevilled India’s economic transformation, this formulation not only implicitly addresses a latent political-sociological preoccupation with the ‘failure’ of the Indian ‘development state’, unlike more standard formulations of the growth/equity trade-off, it also places the constitution and some aspects

9 Austin, *Indian Constitution*, and Galanter, *Competing Equalities* are well-established classics; as are Frankel, *India’s Political Economy* and Rudolph and Hoeber-Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*. For more recent analyses see Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, Chs 2–3; and Deshpande, *Contemporary India*, Ch. 3.

10 Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*, Ch. 10.
of the nature of this state at the centre of its problematic.11 Chatterjee thus extends his characterisation of India’s passive revolution, which under colonial rule signified a political-ideological programme for building up ‘the largest possible nationalist alliance ... against the colonial power’, into the post-1947 era. Now passive revolution was a strategy ‘to contain class conflicts within manageable dimensions, to control and manipulate dispersed power relations in society to further as best as possible the thrust towards accumulation’.12

The salience of the dispersal of power and the conflict between accumulation and legitimation that Chatterjee highlights both clearly evident from their echoes in the context of decolonisation. India’s World War II sacrifices were a recurring theme in wartime and post-war anti-colonial discourses. However, Indivar Kamtekar has demonstrated the great contrast between the scale, intensity and impact of the efforts by their respective wartime states to mobilise resources of manpower, finance and war materials in India and Britain. Contrary to what one might expect in a colonial situation and from a colonial relationship, Kamtekar notes that the terms of ‘India’s participation [in the war effort] show[ed] a pronounced lack of self-confidence’ on the part of the colonial state.13 In terms of its ability to mobilise resources from the dominant classes of their respective societies, the colonial state was a much ‘weaker creature’ than the British state. Furthermore, while state actions led to significant levelling effects in British society, those in India widened social cleavages and strengthened the economic power and political standing of the dominant social classes.14 Following this line of argument, it seems plausible to suggest that while Britain witnessed at least a slowdown in accumulation during World War II (because, among other factors, of the levelling effects of the war, the social and political mobilisations produced, accelerated, or radicalised and transformed by the war, and post-war improvements in the social wage), India witnessed more rapid accumulation thanks to inflation, wartime profiteering, etc., which left its capitalists (and farmers in some regions such as Punjab) in a much stronger position with respect to both metropolitan capital and the colonial and successor states.

As I have argued elsewhere, Britain had no reason to welcome faster accumulation in India—consumption was another matter—since it was thought to arrest accumulation in Britain.15 Given post-war accumulation challenges in Britain, India’s metropolitan rulers had even greater reason than before to fear the effects at home of speedier accumulation in the colony. On the other hand, with the appetite of Indian capital barely whetted by wartime profiteering, Britain in debt to

11 For a recent statement of the growth vs. equity framework see Kohli, State-directed Development, and ‘Politics of Economic Growth’, Parts 1 and 2.
14 Ibid., pp. 220–21.
15 The underlying global logic is worked out in Balachandran, John Bullion’s Empire, Chs 1–2; for a summary of its application to the interwar period, see Balachandran, ‘The Interwar Slump’.
India to the tune of £1.3 billion in April 1946, and confronting a charged political atmosphere in which even the largest industrial interests appeared ready to desert it, the colonial state would have found it difficult indeed to resist the accumulative pressures of Indian capital.\(^{16}\)

Viewed in the light of metropolitan priorities and constraints, an early post-war exit spared Britain an impossible choice between sustaining the accumulative drive of Indian industry whilst hindering accumulation at home and indefinitely delaying the restoration of the global positions of British capital; or promoting a radical (at least by colonial standards) redistributive programme to encourage import-led consumption in India and arrest local accumulation, which would improve Britain’s short-term accumulation problems but only perhaps at the cost of a revolution in social relations in the colony.\(^{17}\) Instead, by handing over power to the Congress party, the colonial rulers sought at one stroke to broaden the alliance in defence of global capital by drawing Indian capital more firmly into it, and impale the nationalist leadership on the very accumulation-legitimation hook they were attempting to wriggle out of. The economic controversies that erupted in early post-independence India give us some insight into the intensity of this conflict.\(^{18}\)

**III**

How did India’s nationalist leadership manage this conflict? How did Indian big business manage the early post-colonial state and discipline its ambitions? What were the effects of this conflict and the manner of its resolution on Indian industrial development and state capacity in the longer term?

*Locked in Place* is a sociologist’s account of the political economy of state and industrial development in post-1947 India. It helps situate this account to recall a puzzle beloved of Indian economists of a certain vintage, viz., that despite their broadly similar starting conditions in 1950 and 1960 respectively, India failed to transform its economy on a scale approaching that normalised by South Korea.

Vivek Chibber explains this failure in terms of the incapacities of the Indian state. This again is not new. Indeed, in framing the failure of India’s industrial development efforts in terms of the ‘twin evils of bureaucratic paralysis and capitalist rent-seeking’, he comes perilously close to echoing long-standing liberal diagnoses of the Indian malady.

\(^{16}\) For an overview of the post-war sterling balances and expenditures controversy, see Balachandran, *Reserve Bank of India*, Ch. 15.

\(^{17}\) The famous ‘Liaquat Ali budget’ of 1946 may in fact be read as a dark warning of this threat.

\(^{18}\) As Michael Kidron’s painstakingly detailed research showed more than four decades ago, Indian industrialists who viewed British capital with hostility until 1947 developed a more ambivalent view towards it in the years afterwards: *Foreign Investments*, pp. 99–104. Conversely, they moved from a position of support to the Congress party to one of ‘hostility’ within a year after independence; pp. 83–97.
However, Chibber rejects the view that the state was inherently incapable of efficient economic management or sustainable industrial transformation. For him, as for many others, South Korea shows the neo-liberal orthodoxy to be wrong and that the developmental state need not fail. The difference between success and failure lay not in the extent of state economic intervention, but in its nature. In South Korea, after some years of economic instability and political uncertainty, a restructured state managed to discipline business, and in exchange for securing the latter’s commercial interests in a competitive export-oriented industrialising economy, guarantee for itself a strategic interventionist role.

Indian capitalists, in contrast, managed to muzzle the developmental impulses of the Indian state in the early years after independence, that is, 1947–51. With import-substituting industrialisation guaranteeing protection from external challenges, they were left free to maximise rents and thwart state initiatives to regulate industrial activity and achieve rapid industrial and economic transformation.

This argument is initiated through a survey of state capacity and the development state (Ch. 2), and the origins of the development state in Korea (Ch. 3). Chapters 4–6 deal with the early history of the development state in India, and its relations with labour and the industrial bourgeoisie. Together, the latter chapters present a perceptive and valuable reconstruction of the contested political economy of early Indian post-colonial statehood.

Chapter 4 challenges the myth of the developmental bourgeoisie by demystifying its association with the Bombay plan. Chibber argues that even the seemingly more radical first part of the Bombay plan (released in January 1944) was not so much a ‘clarion call by a nationalistic bourgeoisie to its peers’ (p. 97), but an opportunistic exercise intended in the uncertain context of the Quit India movement and an ascendant Left to forestall socialistic attacks on business by ‘opening the way for capitalist planning’ (p. 97). (The Left held a similar view at the time.) However, the approaching end of war, new opportunities for expansion on the heels of British capital’s withdrawal from India, and the stabilisation of the Congress Right emboldened Indian big business to repudiate even the milder reformist proposals contained in the second part of the Bombay plan upon its release in early 1945, and strive to roll back controls on distribution and investment. The Indian state also compromised its own capacity for autonomy at the very moment it came under intense pressure to modify industrial policies in a pro-business direction (Ch. 5) when, in the wake of the post-war upsurge in strikes and other working-class actions, the Congress leadership engineered a split in the AITUC and enacted legislative curbs on union rights.

Strengthened materially and politically, Indian big business then went on the offensive. With import substitution already secured as the industrial strategy, it

19 Chibber is not alone here. He might have cited in support Corbridge and Harriss’s account of India’s ‘socially inefficient’ capitalist development (Reinventing India, Ch. 3). Besides being informed by faith in the transformative capacities of the state and making a comparison with the East Asian ‘tigers’, Reinventing India also refers to the stranglehold of propertied interests over the development process, and a state and political system dependent on conciliation.
proceeded to undo any possibility of disciplinary controls on its freedom to allocate investments, price output, or make profits. Mobilising broadly and deploying a range of tactics including the notorious ‘strike’ by capital in 1947–48, it managed to relegate proposals for nationalisation to the back burner, scuttle any threat of a powerful planning apparatus armed with sufficient authority to direct industrial development, and whittle down the government’s powers to regulate industry. The denouement that resulted—the growth of concentration (Ch. 7) and inefficiency, the enrichment of Indian capitalists even as the planning and investment regulatory apparatus became dysfunctional and then counter-productive from the point of view of achieving rapid industrial growth and structural transformation while stubbornly resisting reform (Ch. 8)—was now, as it were, preordained.

Chibber’s account of the formative stages of industrial policy in post-1947 India, its subsequent unravelling, and the weakening ability of the state to discipline Indian capital despite the rising costs of its failure is well-researched and rendered with verve. The comparative frame of this book also raises several stimulating questions, of which I consider two here.

Export orientation is offered as a key determinant of South Korea’s successful development, because it promoted an incentive structure attuned to improving industrial efficiency and made capital more amenable to state discipline. South Korean export-led industrialisation (ELI) was the result of a consensus between state and big business. What persuaded South Korean capitalists to embrace ELI? The answer, it turns out, was not a stick: state control over the levers of finance and imports would come later, and there is no suggestion that Park Chung-Hee’s campaign against ‘illicit accumulation’ was intended as part of a strategic plan to discipline capital. The key factor instead was the carrot of incorporation into Japan’s overseas marketing networks as its trading conglomerates turned to South Korea for sourcing products at the lower end of the manufacturing value chain, which its own rapidly transforming industry was beginning to abandon. Consequently, South Korean firms had ‘access to export markets that virtually no other country—except Taiwan—enjoyed’. Whether India could have made a similar success of ELI is a much wider question. But even on the evidence offered in this work, it is possible to suggest that South Korea (along with Taiwan) represented an exception rather than an easily emulated norm.

Chibber’s suggestion to revisit the political history of the early years of independent India is timely and important. Un-packaging the myth of the development bourgeoisie, for instance, crucially helps re-centre neglected developments such as the immobilisation of the Indian working class. However, while state policies towards the working class are deservedly given prominence in discussions of economic policy manoeuvres in post-1947 India, they disappear from the wider comparative frame of the book, leaving one to wonder why the immobilisation (or suppression) of the working class promoted relatively stagnant rentier capitalism in India, but rapid industrial transformation in South Korea.

A study confined to industrial policy can also yield only partial insights into the political economy of Indian post-colonial state-building. It cannot address
questions about Indian big business’s sway over economic policy as a whole and its relations with the dominant agrarian propertied classes, and issues of agrarian relations and reform, and their impact on industrial development more generally. The analytical approach adopted here also precludes a consideration of issues of state and class legitimacy. Nevertheless, Locked in Place is a courageous attempt to stir the contents of the historical black box of the post-colonial Indian state, and provides a valuable platform for broader, historically informed explorations of development and state-building in post-1947 India.

IV

Chibber’s comparison with South Korea also serves as a useful reminder that the conflict between accumulation and legitimation in post-colonial societies was not a purely internal one. It had important external implications that are easily ignored, used as we are now to national and other narratives that retrospectively naturalise the transformations that the international system underwent in the wake of decolonisation. Accounts of post-colonial state building usually pay little attention to the external dimensions of sovereignty, the scope and implications of which were subjects of intense debate in the 1960s and 1970s, when an emergent sense of a global southern identity began to find reflection in campaigns for a ‘new international economic order’ and a ‘new international information order’. Contemporary public memory also appears to share the liberal assumption that because the legal principle of national sovereignty was already well-established in an international system, which as recently as the 1920s had coped with an expanding number of nation-states, its application to the newly independent states and their relations with the great powers and the international system was spontaneous, transparent and unambiguous. Few looking back to the 1960s from the vantage point of the 1990s or the present are also able to resist the conclusion that whatever the proclivities of the former colonial powers or their mid-twentieth century heirs, the post-war bipolar confrontation helped normalise newly independent nation-states by promoting their de jure sovereignty, and, outside a few countries caught directly in the confrontation, the conditions for enhancing de facto sovereignty by creating opportunities for national economic, political and cultural development based on state-mediated transfers of values, capital and technology. Even in post-colonialist ethnographies, the central, even if somewhat ambivalent, position that the nation and the state occupy in the politics of a post-colonial society helps to naturalise them in ways that occlude their complex historical experiences domestically as well as in the international system.20

Decolonisation, however, meant a protracted and often painful reconfiguration of the inside and the outside, the internal and the external, the colony and the

20 For example, Ferguson, Anti-Politics Machine; even in its ‘failure’ and subversion, we are expected to recognise and critique the autonomy and writ of the totalising state: for example, Scott, Seeing like a State. It is noteworthy that so many of Scott’s examples are from the developing world.
colonising power, the ‘nation’ and the international system. Ex-colonial powers were never absent from these reconfigurations, nor from the paths and processes through which post-colonial nations attempted to mediate their relations with an international system into which the former’s power had already been deeply encoded. For instance, till the late-1950s stampede of colonies towards independence from colonial rule was recognised as unstoppable and as requiring new innovations in international institutions and practices for managing them, the new nation-states could not even take the external recognition of their nationhood and sovereignty for granted. Years could sometimes pass before great powers conferred formal recognition. Admission to the UN also proved contentious for some nations in the 1950s, when it was quite common to view the institution as a ‘white man’s club’ ill-adapted to accommodating a growing number of African and Asian nations emerging from colonial rule. The UN’s future could sometimes become a source of concern even in the west, such as for example before the Asian Relations Conference (Delhi, 1947) and Bandung, which were both feared in some quarters as the first steps towards setting up an organisation of African and Asian states to rival the west-dominated UN.

In the early 1950s, neither the US nor the Soviet Union had much sympathy for the notions of sovereignty entertained by the newly independent states. By the late 1950s the US was also beginning to be concerned by the effects of African decolonisation and independence on its own still widely-segregated black minority, and to contend with the phenomenon in new ways.\(^{21}\) As late as the mid-1960s, despite the majority that former colonies now commanded in the General Assembly (effective decision-making power had, however, consequently shifted to the Security Council), and initiatives such as the UN Conference on Trade and Development, many former colonies still suspected the UN to be an instrument of ‘super-power hegemony’; and especially in the background of China (PRC)’s exclusion, the threat of some of them withdrawing from the UN did not entirely recede until the defeat of efforts to stage a ‘second Bandung’.\(^{22}\)

Culturally, the colonial tendency to dismiss anti-colonial movements as elitist and unrepresentative continued to dominate western perceptions of most post-colonial states, even when these happened to be representative democracies. The subject position that the post-colonial world occupied in the human and social sciences, and more generally in the western public consciousness, requires little elaboration.

\(^{21}\) For an iconic essay describing western fears of the newly independent Afro-Asian world and offering an unintended portrait of the vast cultural distance that separated even a radical and fundamentally sympathetic Afro-American commentator from this world, see Wright, *Color Curtain*. On the powerful symbolism of ‘national liberation’ for race relations in the US, see Plummer, ‘Castro in Harlem’.

\(^{22}\) For a useful but rather Indo-centric and anti-communist account of these processes, see Jansen, *Non-alignment*. The political economy of radical Third World statehood is partly explored in Malley, *Call from Algeria*. 
Though de jure sovereignty was not in itself an issue, India was far from immune to projects that sought to underline its broader subject status. Tilly notes about post-war statehood that ‘the successful claim of one relatively distinct people to its own state usually spelled the rejection of at least one other people’s claim to a state’. The legitimacy of these rejections and their implications for India’s unity continued to be debated in academic and political writings in the west at least until the mid-1960s, and with some interruptions until as recently as the early 1990s. Despite its large size, its democratic institutions, and the obvious power and capacity of its state, western powers, in particular, repeatedly subjected India’s efforts to explore its sovereign status to close, critical and constraining scrutiny, for example in the context of its relations with the USSR (which grew to include weapons and aircraft purchases by the early 1960s), its development strategies and priorities, the decision to march troops into Goa, etc. Some of these issues, such as Kashmir and Goa, also empowered external powers to interrogate or challenge the discursive and self-proclaimed, normatively constitutive, foundations of Indian statehood.

This external challenge to post-colonial states’ capacity for self-definition, and thus to their sovereignty (in both its meanings), and their compelling need, always pursued under the penetrating glare of former colonial overlords and their local allies, to fashion a state that would give expression to a consensual idea of a nation without (as the new state elites feared) empowering the subordinated social groups to test this consensual idea too strongly, and thus preserve the national project in the course of realising it— all these introduced a powerful external dimension to their quest for legitimation, and recursively to the modalities of their constitution.

V

It has been suggested that like the production and administration of social welfare in twentieth-century Europe, particularly in the post-World War II period, development was the ‘main reason of state’ in post-colonial India, and its principal means of legitimation. On the face of it this appears undeniable, though one should perhaps add that as decolonisation enabled the former colonial power to set itself up ‘externally’ as a decisive component of ‘world opinion’—the USA’s dependence upon it for ‘knowledge’ about its former colonies enabled Britain, for instance, to exert profound influence on American policies and attitudes—this mode of legitimation also had a powerful, if in the long run diminishing and self-defeating, external logic.

Development is sometimes said to have a long history going back to the late eighteenth century, with the ‘development state’ often spoken of as a late nineteenth-century artifact. Where it is not offered as a legitimising ideology of (late) colonialism, ‘development’ is argued to have succeeded colonialism as a new modality of

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23 Tilly, Coercion, p. 117.

24 For example, Chatterjee, Nation, p. 203; Gupta, Postcolonial Developments, p. 33; for Europe, see Tilly, Coercion, pp. 119-26.
western control over the post-colonial south.\textsuperscript{25} Any history of the state and Indian development would have to explore these genealogies of the idea and its power relations. However, to restrict oneself to them would be to ignore the creative and transformative intellectual and political energies that were attracted to ideas and programmes of development, and the many layers of elite and subaltern interventions through which they found shifting shapes and meanings.

It is also simplistic and impoverishing to think of development merely as a ‘regime of representation’, as Escobar does, and ignore its presence in the life-worlds of post-colonial societies as a dynamic and transformative ensemble of ideas, possibilities, and practices.\textsuperscript{26} It is also to be doubted how far development may already be regarded as a global ideology of the day in the late 1940s and early 1950s. (In fact, Escobar’s timeline echoes that in many western narratives of Third World ‘failure’, in which decolonisation is immediately said to have been followed by assiduous western-aided efforts to diversify former colonial economies and promote their development.) Though by the mid-1950s there were many historical and policy-oriented studies of ‘development’, the latter was not naturalised as the state’s \emph{raison d’être} until sometime in the mid-1950s, and then only for a relatively brief period when a new international context shaped by a significant reorientation of Soviet external policies strengthened the political and intellectual voices championing it in the west. The mistaken representation by the mid-century edition of the \emph{Times Atlas of the World}, of the then and ever stillborn Damodar valley project (at least in its original conception) as realised fact, on the basis of some late 1940s Geological Survey of India maps produced to identify the distribution of mineral resources in the project’s expected submerged area, offers an ironic but powerful example of the naturalisation of development.\textsuperscript{27}

By then India was already well into its second Five-Year Plan, which has retained an iconic status for some because of its championing of large publicly-funded investments in heavy industry (that it, however, failed to tie up resources for). It is less well-known that the second plan also outlined schemes to advance some admittedly limited agrarian reforms, build a network of cooperative credit institutions that would take credit to the small tenant farmer, and establish on a firmer footing plans for village and ‘community development’, which were also politically and institutionally imagined and laid out in strikingly Gandhian terms. But without much eye to detail—for example with regard to financing and physical resource mobilisation—the plan only amounted to a somewhat self-contradictory wish list.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25} For example, Escobar, \emph{Encountering Development}.

\textsuperscript{26} As a regime of representation, development possesses a longer lineage, which it visibly shares for example with late nineteenth/early twentieth-century colonial discourses on agrarian commercialisation. It is also thus not valid to identify this regime of representation with a particular political-institutional order (the US-dominated post-war order) or modality of control (post-colonialism).

\textsuperscript{27} On this see Klingensmith, ‘One valley and a thousand’, pp. 1–4. This edition of the \emph{Times Atlas} went to press in 1959.

\textsuperscript{28} As even sympathetic contemporary commentators such as Oskar Lange noted: \emph{Papers in Economics and Sociology}, pp. 460–62.
Did the apparent contradictions and failures of the second plan reveal a failure of the will of the post-colonial state and its capacity to discipline predatory capital? Many would perhaps say, ‘Yes’.

However, whatever its teleological premises, ported templates and eventual outcomes, couldn’t we also regard the broad and eclectic sweep of the Indian development project as a testimony to the creative imagination of post-colonial nation and statehood? Do these and other imagined projects for Indian development not warrant the production of historical narratives exploring the social, political and intellectual contexts and processes of their production? Would not a silencing of these pasts impoverish not only our knowledge of them, but also our imagination of possible futures?

*Developing India* discusses the intellectual and social pre-history, as it were, of the Indian development project, and is premised on answering the above questions emphatically in the affirmative. Many visions of development were already written into the spatially national political economic projects that were beginning to be produced in later nineteenth-century India. Zachariah mines discussions about development in India in the late colonial period (that is, the 1930s and 1940s), when the mere production of spatial and moral imaginaries of the national idea was yielding gradually to the realisation of a distinct modern political imaginary in the form of the nation-state. He is thus able to trace multiple meanings and significances of the concept, some still emanating from broader concerns for ‘regeneration, uplift, and liberation’, before the language and disciplinary regimens of economics appropriated it from the early post-war years and attempted to empty it of other resonances.

The monograph begins with an exploration of the social, political and discursive contexts for discussions about development in India. These contexts were produced by changing, though always apparently sovereign, imperial and metropolitan, intellectual influences interacting with the requirements of colonial power, sensibilities of the anti-colonial resistance, and their mutual negotiations. Nationalists juxtaposed and rearranged the boundaries of several received discourses to appropriate their language and logic, and turn them against the colonial rulers. Thus, for example, ‘development’ acquired significations in the 1930s nationalist vocabulary that were moral as much as economic, to an extent that it appeared to produce a shared space of meaning between Gandhi the overt anti-developmentalist, and Visvesvaraya the impatient moderniser. Such ‘sharing’ even hinged partly on the unifying ‘conventions’ of a decades-long imperial discourse on ‘material and moral progress’.

A second part of this chapter discusses the nationalist intellectual milieu in urban India, and its modes of absorbing and transmitting ideas and information. Chapter 3 deals with the new ‘reformist’ discourses and strategies of legitimation of the late colonial state, which now advanced development as a *raison d’être* for colonial rule, and which sought to appropriate some of the idioms and programmes of

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29 Goswami, *Producing India*, especially Ch. 7.
of the nationalist resistance for this project, besides exploring the latent conservative potential in overtly Gandhian programmes of ‘constructive work’ and ‘rural uplift’. The following chapter about debates around Gandhian ideas on development argues that contrary to accusations and claims about them, Gandhi’s views on the ideal socio-economic order were variations on nationalist replies to western discourses, rather than an alternative to either. It is not clear—like much else in this dense but painstaking work—how far such apparent kinship was tactical and resulted from a conscious effort to moderate Gandhi’s apparent exteriority to the premises and presumptions structuring contemporary economic debates. This is all the more so as Zachariah also contends that no argument based on rejecting modernity could hope to gain any serious ears in the 1930s, and rather than couching their views in anti-modernist terms, Gandhi and his followers articulated their difference in terms of a prior modernity of Indian traditions and their ethical and moral bases. This, as Gyan Prakash’s *Another Reason* (a notable omission in an otherwise impressive bibliography) shows, was not entirely original.

The terrain of debate was perhaps an impossible one for Gandhi and his followers. Their rivals also hegemonised the idioms of public discourse on economic matters. J.C. Kumarappa, whose writings are discussed at some length in this chapter as the principal purveyor and populariser of Gandhi’s economic ideas, was, despite his US education, proximity to Gandhi, and a talent for writing economic pamphlets for the AICC, quickly sidelined in practical discussions about Indian economic policies. Ironically, by the mid-1940s and more so in the 1950s, Gandhian economic ideas were also mediated into public and policy domains by ‘modernists’ such as Jawaharlal Nehru, in opposition to whom Gandhians often framed their positions and arguments. ‘Development’, as Zachariah argues, may still have been a fluid category in the 1930s and 1940s, suggesting several contending ideas about the meanings, processes and agencies of ‘progress’, and therefore many more possibilities than could be realised later. But it may still be wondered how far or in what ways these possibilities may have endured; or in what other ways ideas about development may have been transformed during a decisive period when more fundamental ideas about the nation and its possible futures were being disciplined and impoverished as a precondition for India’s reconfiguration as an independent nation within apparatuses of domination shaped by empire.

VI

Spaces for alternative imaginings of the nation or other forms of collective existence and their respective contexts have themselves to be imagined before these spaces, if not the alternative imaginings, can be realised. However, these spaces cannot be imagined outside the material conditions and relations that nurture and help render them to us.

Take for instance the Indian second plan. It was undoubtedly the borrowed product of an aging but alert and ambitious statistician’s awed fascination for a breathtaking intellectual trick reducing complex human and social relationships...
to two manipulable variables that, to the great delight of his political patron, also appeared to be ideologically and politically neutral. But even this plan could not resist subtle encroachments and subversion by other actors and voices with their own visions, meanings and modalities of development. It was finally in the sphere of politics—domestic and external—that the shape and substance of the realized second plan was determined. However, the plan and the various debates surrounding its framing, implementation and failure seeded and transplanted into the public consciousness memories and awareness of alternative possibilities whose own political values, however these were described at the time and subsequently by radical supporters of the second plan, were by no means stable or unchanging. Over the decades and across various spaces, such memories and awareness have been interpreted and reproduced in ways that have, at least arguably, inspired and provided ideological and intellectual resources for a range of dispersed and concentrated initiatives to explore alternative social possibilities. But the minds, consciousness, and personal and social relations of the individuals and groups that mobilised such memories and resources had often themselves been shaped in social contexts and institutions that would not have existed, at least not in the same way, without the grand fantasies for post-colonial statehood that projects such as the second plan reflected, and in their own halting ways, executed.

Externally too, these grand imaginings necessitated, and the associated public investments in education and research in the social sciences and humanities disciplines helped produce, a critical post-colonial positionality and perspective in India’s relations with the world. With some kind of a mediated great power status now within its apparent reach, the Indian state has come under pressure to abandon this positionality and perspective. Its transformation within a decade from a state that challenged the ethical and political premises of the nuclear non-proliferation regime (as ‘nuclear apartheid’) to one willing to enforce it offers an example of these pressures and the changing matrices of power within which they find new meanings.

Even if the Indian state disowns, as all states must at some stage do in order to ‘succeed’ and be ‘accepted’, the critical positionality and perspective that accompanied its early grand imaginings of post-colonial statehood, the latter have also seeped into the critical public sphere in ways that make them much harder to reverse (which is not to say that they cannot be transformed or their edges blunted). Deshpande notes how, say in comparison with Turkey, Indian sociologists have always had a more complex and critical engagement with ideas about modernity. These troubled early engagements, evident even in the writings of an early Indian sociologist such as M.N. Srinivas, have exploded in more recent times into a huge outpouring of studies across several disciplines (naturally except economics), deploying critical post-colonial perspectives that have helped challenge and re-examine these disciplines’ axiomatic foundations, conceptual tools and categories, and established practices. It is no secret, even though it is a fact rarely stated in

30 Deshpande, Contemporary India, p. 36.
print, that many of the most creative contributors to such studies are directly or indirectly legatees of the grand imaginings of the Indian national project and its capacious pragmatism.

Where past imaginings of statehood are indispensable notes for one’s own autobiographies, disowning histories as a mode of engaging this past appears suspiciously modern in the Lockean sense of the modern (male) individual. Resisting coming to historical terms with the layers that the post-colonial project of nation and statehood have seeped into us, or acknowledging the contexts it has provided for a variety of critical, transforming agencies and interventions, ironically puts postcolonialist critics at odds with the ways in which a supposedly authentic people outside the thrall of the ‘modern’ are argued to engage with their pasts. Last but not least, it also burdens our ability to conceive alternative futures with the over-accumulating detritus of an apparently frozen and unchanging present.

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