



Indian Political System

FOURTH EDITION



 Pearson

Himanshu Roy
Mahendra Prasad Singh

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Fourth Edition

Edited by

Mahendra Prasad Singh

Himanshu Roy



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Preface

Himanshu Roy

In the past ten years, since the publication of the third edition of this book, two major changes can be delineated in Indian politics: one, many social laws have been enacted in the legislatures at the Centre and in States under the pressure of democratic upsurge which have democratized liberalism, for example, Employment Guarantee Act, Right to Information Act, Food Security Act, Forest Rights, Civic Rights, Rights for Women, etc., were enacted during Congress regime; and second, at the Centre, and in many States, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as the dominant party forming the governments, where earlier it was in opposition, which has now led to a shift in the governmentality. The focus now is on new policy formulation, on their effective implementation, on plugging the leakages of resources in development process, on eliminating corruption through transparency, and on actuating efficiency in administration. Moreover, the new governments have involved public in policy formulation, for example, on education, health, governance, environment, and on infrastructure development. The functioning of the administrative agencies are constantly monitored through new technology, review meetings, complaint cells. This has begun to reflect on the results visible in railway, defense, highway projects, in 'Make In India', in 'Start Up India' or in the foreign policy which has been effectively transformed into soliciting global investment in India to make her a manufacturing hub of the world, to generate employment, and skill development for the expanding young population. Furthermore, some of the old policies like Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and Awas Yojna have been rejigged and realigned for better asset creation. The new policies or the realignment of old policies, as indicated above, may speed up creation of rural urban infrastructure, may actuate efficiency and transparency in the functioning of administration or, it may also speed up rural to urban migration and rural-urban stress. Few incremental changes have become visible, such as, disaster management, highway development, etc.

Most importantly, the BJP has co-opted different sections of society in its government, in its party organizations, in its icons, in its programs, and in

its ideology. It has become more amorphous and overarching. Its expansion and success has been a reflection of this.

However, the control of governmental power by the BJP at the Centre with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister has unleashed a counter political discourse by his political-ideological opponents. The themes are intolerance, nationalism and socio-economic policies. The reaction is visible in the media, in the parliament, and in many of their micro-macro acts.

This edition, revised and enlarged with two new chapters on health and education policy, will add to the pedagogy on Indian politics.

We thank Kaushal Jajware and Sailza Kumari for their work.

Introduction

Mahendra Prasad Singh

The post-colonial political system in India is founded on two major reconciliations between democracy and capitalism, on the one hand, and parliamentarianism and federalism, on the other. Democracy implies individual rights and liberties, equality, popular sovereignty, and constitutionalism (i.e., rule of law, not only by law, but governments are limited by the constitution). Capitalism is based on property rights and attendant privileges, profit-driven market mechanism, the ideal of economic competition, and the reality of monopolistic and oligopolistic concentration of economic powers. The two are obviously antithetical, yet in the historical trajectory of liberal democracies in the West and in the Third World, democracy and capitalism have coexisted in an indifferent and uneasy coalition. Likewise, parliamentarism and federalism are primarily contradictory. In parliamentary form of government the final chain of command ends up in the Parliament, whereas federalism is premised on division of power between the Parliament and state legislatures and decentralization. Yet Canada, originally and innovatively, in 1867, Australia in 1900, India in 1949, and some other countries like Germany in Europe have tried to combine these two divergent principles and forms of government in their constitutions.

These two aforementioned reconciliations are the products of complexities and diversities of India's composite culture and social structure as also the ideological consensus forged during the nationalist movement and after independence. This ideological consensus attempted to prepare a middle ground between the extremes of capitalism and socialism. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution proclaims a state founded by it to be "a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic" and enjoins it "to secure to all its citizens: justice, social, economic, and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity, and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the Nation". Moreover, Parts III and IV of the Constitution on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy respectively give expression both to the early liberalism centered on bourgeois political rights and later liberalism that opened up to accommodate

some economic policy goals aimed at creating a more egalitarian society with at least minimum social securities. The Directives do not really amount to either a full-fledged post-World War II Western welfare state (e.g., Scandinavia, England, Canada, etc.) nor to a Soviet socialist economy. But they certainly give expression to the intention of going beyond classical liberalism *a la* Adam Smith to set up an Indian version of “socialistic pattern” of economic development. The Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy of planned economic development with the state (public sector) seeking to scale the “commanding heights of the economy” became the main ingredients of the new economy. The structure of mixed economy that emerged after Independence allowed both the public sector and the private sector to operate, but the latter came to be increasingly put under a variety of state controls that came to be pejoratively called the “permit-license-quota Raj” by conservatives like C. Rajagopalachari who pleaded for more space and greater freedom for the private sector. The vast agrarian sector, after some land reform measures, remained as a private peasant household production sector. The Indian government under Nehru followed economic policies premised on self-reliance and growth with justice and equity.

With increasing political populism and crisis in the public sector of the economy under the government of Indira Gandhi, Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and P.V. Narasimha Rao, especially the latter, introduced significant measures of economic liberalization, bureaucratic deregulation, public sector disinvestment, and structural readjustment to permit a greater scope for the market, simultaneously opening it up to international competition, investment, and technology. The most comprehensive package of economic liberalization by Indian standards has been brought about by the Rao government and the successive governments have not substantially turned back; if anything, they have gone further in this direction. The Rao government started as a one-party minority government, but subsequently turned into a majority one in the latter half of its mandate. When Rao initiated the major package of economic reforms, his government was in a minority with oppositional majority in the Parliament. So evidently the economic reforms represented a consensus in the party system, at least a dominant consensus with only marginal opposition from the Left and the Right. For the Rao government and the successor coalition governments it was led successively by the Janata Party/Dal, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Indian National Congress (Indira), BJP under Narendra Modi until 2014 have willy-nilly continued the same economic policies, even though they widely diverged in their socio-cultural policies. Since most of these governments have been coalitional, the economic policies pursued by them have been products of delicate bargaining and balance in steering committees of the coalition cabinets. Even the Hindu Right nationalist BJP, as first majority party to get a single party majority in the Lok Sabha after a gap of 30 years in 2014, has continued the ongoing traditions of federal coalition governments and neoliberal economic reforms. Another notable feature of

the economic reforms is that they have come to pass without any formal amendments to the Constitution.

Both capitalism and socialism swear by democracy, each claiming to establish a more genuine democracy. Marxists claim to institute economic democracy in place of empty political democracy of the liberals. They ask what is the use of formal political equality without freedom from hunger and other wants? The liberals retort that men do not live by bread alone! Liberals like John Rawls argue that both liberty and equality are equally important values which cannot be compromised, except that in case of equality a compromise is permissible only in favor of the most disadvantaged sections of the society.

The historical evolution of both liberal democracies and socialist societies shows that the correlation between capitalism and democracy has proved, at least thus far, to be more viable than that between socialism and democracy. However, real democratic possibilities have often been thwarted by both capitalism and socialism in the real world thus far. The experience of socialist countries so far attests that not only democratic freedoms but also economic equality beyond a certain point have in their domains remained a will o' wisp. Capitalist democracies too get very uneasy when the parties of the Left and the Right confront each other with really radical ideological options in a mood to fight it out to the hilt. The Great Economic Depression of the 1930s in the West was the product of the constant fall in the demand in the face of expanding capitalist production due to the repeated failure of a weak working class to win over continuous and significant increase in wages. The period witnessed the collapse of democracy in Germany and Italy and the rise of Nazism and Fascism.

The West emerged from the Great Economic Depression and the Second World War and followed Keynesian economic policies of demand management by expansion of state activities and expenditure, and instituted in the process what came to be known as Welfare State. By the late 1960s the welfare state came to grief due to "stagflation"—galloping inflation outpacing the steady wage expansion of workers and employees and the resultant fall in demand causing recession in the economy. The wars in West Asia and oil-shocks due to heavy increase in the price of the gasoline and petroleum products further intensified the economic crisis.

"Reaganomics" and "Thatcherism" which surfaced in by the 1980s and 1990s spelled the undoing of the welfare state and Keynesianism. The reconciliation of capitalism and democracy in the welfare state proved to be unviable. The restructuring of production globally coupled with the decline of the power of the organized working class to counteract and countervail the power of capital was the result. In most recent elections in the West social democratic parties have registered electoral gains, including power to govern. In India too, the left has declined in parliamentary as well as state assembly elections (notably in West Bengal yielding ground to Trinamool

Congress in 2011 after 34 years of continuous Left Front rule and lost again to it in 2016) in the recent years.

The collapse of communism in 1989 in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, failure of liberal welfare states and crisis in the social democratic welfare states since the 1970s and 1980s under fiscal overloads and human cupidity by onslaughts of capitalist globalization after the end of the Cold War, have cumulatively tended to produce enormous increase in economic inequalities and disparities among classes and regions *within* as well as *among* nations on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, financial crisis in East Asian miracle capitalist economies in the late 1990s and in metropolitan capitalist centres in North America, European Union, and Japan in 2008-2009 have produced what has belatedly been called the Great Economic Recession.

There is some sign of the economic and political rise of Asia in the post-Cold War world. China, India, and Indonesia have emerged as the fastest growing economies in the world in the 21st century. Despite heavy pressures from Pakistan and China, India in the post-economic liberalization phase has for the first time since the British period and after, scored a rate of annual GDP growth of 5-7 percent. It is spectacular compared to the average growth rate of 1.5 percent in British India and 3.5 per cent in the post-Independence period before the 1990s. The growth rate suffered a setback in 2016-17 due to demonetization of higher value currency and transition to Goods and Services Tax (GST). But by the year-end of 2017, economic prospects are looking up and would presumably be more robust in the years ahead. What should, however, worry the policy makers is that the high GDP growth is not adequately matched in terms of distributive justice and human development especially measured in terms of education, public health, and poverty. India has been ranked in top 100 among nations in the ease of doing business but also ranks in top 100 in the hunger index.

The world seems to be on the crossroads without any definitive sign whether capitalist globalization resulting in the decline of the nation-state and the triumph of the global market forces will have a field day or neo-Hobbesian political conservatism strengthening the national state protecting its domestic industries which will finally emerge victorious. The democratic dream predicted on participatory democracy and extension of democracy from the political arena to the workplace and family however, has been expanding farther.

The combination of parliamentarianism and federalism in India's parliamentary federal system, has led the politics in India, in the 1980s and 1990s, towards federalizing the predominantly parliamentary regime that had become overly centralized during the long periods of Congress predominance. The 1980s witnessed a phenomenal spurt in the rise of demands for greater state autonomy by parties, movements, and state governments forcing Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to appoint in 1983 the first Commission on Centre-State Relations chaired by Justice R.S. Sarkaria of the Supreme Court

and comprising two other commissioners. The Commission submitted its monumental 2-volume report in 1987-88, favoring the strengthening of inter-governmental agencies of consultation and deliberation such as the National (Economic) Development Council, Inter-State Council, Planning Commission, Finance Commission, etc., and constitutionally entrenching those that do not already enjoy such status. It also recommended a fundamental change in the attitude and behavior of federal and state functionaries, especially the Governor, in consonance with the federal value of state autonomy. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government appointed the National Commission for Review of the Working of the Constitution (2002) headed by Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah and the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government appointed the second Commission on Centre-State Relations chaired by Justice M.M. Punchhi (2010) recommended a slew of some of the same federal constitutional reforms as the Sarkaria Commission plus a few additional ones. However, none of these reforms has yet been implemented by the government, including the ones that appointed them.

Nevertheless, the trend of greater federalization of the Indian political system has moved on steadily largely under the impact of party system transformation from one-party dominance to multiparty system with federal coalitional governance since 1989. There has been a reversal of this trend since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections which was spectacularly won by Narendra Modi-led BJP, yet the federal thrust of the system has not been blunted, thanks to the continuing electoral base of some regional parties like All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK, belatedly suffering a setback in the demise of its supremo, J. Jayalalitha in December 2016), Biju Janata Dal, and Trinamool Congress, as the oppositional majority in the federal second chamber Rajya Sabha countervailing the governmental majority in the national chamber, Lok Sabha.

Indian federalism is rooted in the country's history and regional diversities. The growing trend of federalization in the past two decades is accounted by at least three factors that have become active in recent times. The first of these is the growing levels of politicization and relative deprivation experienced by the various social groups and regions, especially the peasants and farmers all over the country and some ethnic groups having regional concentration, especially in Assam, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir. Authoritarian trends in the dominant Congress party and its inability to provide avenues for political mobility to newly politicized groups in some States and also the dissatisfaction of the mass public with it led to the emergence of non-Congress all-India or regional parties, augmenting the trend of federalization.

This leads us to the second factor behind the growing federalization of the Indian polity, namely, the party system's transition from one-party dominance to multi-party system of polarized pluralism and regionalism. This growing diversity in the party system resulted in the multiplicity of parties in control of the two chambers of the Parliament and state legislatures and

the various state governments. All these factors and forces together heralded the era of coalition governments at the centre and in some States. However, the growing trend of the absence of intra-party democracy is turning into the Achilles' heel of Indian democracy as it deepens the crisis of democratic and constitutional governance of India and its states.

The judicial behavior is the third factor contributing to the growing trend of federalization. In any federal system the judiciary inevitably emerges as the final adjudicator of jurisdictional conflicts between the federal and State governments. The position of the judiciary is further strengthened if the written federal constitution also contains, as the Indian Constitution does, a written charter of fundamental rights of citizens. Judicial activism over the controversy on the constitutional amendments in India goes back to at least late 1960s (*Golaknath v. State of Punjab*, Supreme Court, 1967) and *Keshavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, Supreme Court, 1973). Activism over socio-economic, civic, and environmental issues is a development of the 1980s and 1990s. This has developed in the context of dysfunctionality of the executive and legislative organs of the state. The judicial activism in the federal domain surfaced in the Supreme Court's judgement in *S.R. Bommai v. the Union of India* (1994), in which the Supreme Court for the first time reviewed and declared unconstitutional in some specific instances of the proclamations of President's rule in some states; earlier the Supreme Court had been reticent to look into such cases as "political thickets" within the domain of the Union executive. In the changed ambience, the Patna High Court in 1997, asserted that the courts could even advise the President on whether the constitutional machinery in a state had actually broken down, inviting central intervention. Until now the matter had been under the exclusive purview of the executive (the Governor and the President, in effect the Union Council of Ministers). One may also add that the constitutional offices of the President and Governors are now increasingly becoming more self-conscious about their constitutional responsibilities, especially in the context of "hung" legislatures and coalition or minority governments. A new federal ferment has come to grip the Indian political system.

The process of liberalized capitalism, thus, has resulted into two major transformation; economically, old capitalist production methods and pre-capitalist social formation have been marginalized and market relations have been strengthened and expanded; politically, new party system and federal relations have emerged and social structure has become more democratic. This dynamics of social change and the constant growth of knowledge necessitated a new addition of this book which has been enlarged and revised. Two new chapters have been incorporated and many chapters have been revised.

In the chapters that follow, these general trends in the Indian political system are examined more closely. Part I deals with the historical context and legacies that impinge on the contemporary polity. Beginning with the evolution of the state, the colonial state in India, the section focuses on

the role of colonial capitalism that gradually replaced the preceding traditional village-centric economy and decentralized state structure with market economy and modern state having rational-legal bureaucracy and limited representative institutions. The national movement that emerged as a consequence of this rule had different approaches and visions to solve their contemporary problems. It not only freed the country from the colonial yoke but also created the governmental structures for further governance through constitutional mode. The basic principle was liberal-democratic rule premised on capitalist economy under the command of the state, both of which, in essence, were planted by the British.

The governmental structures which Part II deals with are comprised of parliamentary federalism along with the executive and the judiciary. The representative democracy becoming more participatory with the passage of time has not only liberalized the fundamental rights of the citizens but has also brought directive principles concerned with the core issues of development and governance, at par with the fundamental rights in some respects through judicial interpretation and activism. Not only that, it has facilitated the federalization of polity by checking the misuse of powers of the Union executive and has been the motor force of democratization of some of the Constitutional and political bodies in which elements of decay had set in. It also encouraged the legislature to formulate laws that provided impetus to secularization of polity. Simultaneously, it also acted on deterrent against the unaccountable behavior of the political parties and trade unions towards the public in general. Such themes have been discussed independently in Part III with much broader perspectives that also include topics like Panchayati Raj, gender issue, regionalism and electoral process. Basically, all these themes revolve around issues that influence and mobilize considerable number of people or its different segments. Political parties, non-governmental organizations, panchayats, and trade unions play an important role in such mobilization that calls for policy formulation and brings the state face to face with the people.

Part IV deals with such public policies that touches upon the major chunk of population and important areas of society. The discussion brings forth the trends of development in respective fields, points out the flaws in the policies, brings forth the areas of concern and suggests alternative or remedial measures.

Finally, Part V discusses the trends of development in India since Independence and based on it points out its future prospects. The focus is on three aspects: participation of the people in democratization process for determining their own destiny, thrust on global trade and capital flow and global and regional integration of the Indian economy. All the three issues manifest in multifarious ways with no unilinear development.

To sum up, the volume deals with important and topical issues that influence the Indian people and provides a critique and alternative to the public policies and problems of governance.

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COLONIAL BACKDROP

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1

The Colonial State

Mahendra Prasad Singh

Sketching the historical evolution of the Indian state, particularly the British colonial state, is necessary for an adequate understanding of Indian politics. This task is, however, fraught with methodological problems. This is so on account of the zigsaw puzzle of piecing together the intricate chronological and thematic units in time and place among the diverse state-systems which cover the space. Temporal and theoretical disjunctures often appear impossible to bridge due to the paucity of data and conceptual imprecision. Professional historians may feel inclined to shy away from some of these methodological traps, taking shelter in specialization in the historiography of any specific state of broad periodization of Indian history into ancient, medieval, and modern. But, a political scientist in his long march into history to understand and explain continuity and discontinuities in India's past and present must confront these problems headlong, albeit candidly highlighting the methodological problems in this endeavour. The first part of this paper sketches the evolution of the state in India in terms of the prevailing historiography on the topic. Besides, it seeks to conceptualize and fill in the gaps in the theoretical understanding of the British colonial and post-colonial states in India. The second part presents a critique of the historiography of some states in Indian history. The third part concludes this essay with an outline of the institutional legacies of the states in Indian history of the post-colonial Indian nation-state.



We can delineate at least three broad themes of transition having a direct bearing on the evolution of the Indian state. First, there is the transformation of a pre-state social formation based on lineage and tribe in the state. This happened in the Vedic or post-Vedic societies in the North and Sangam period in the South at the dawn of history in these regions. Presumably, a similar transition must have transpired in the pre-Vedic

period in the Indus valley and other Harappan and Mohanjodaran sites in the North-West with their centres in Sindh and Punjab, where either a theocratic state or a republican oligarchy is supposed to have existed. While no textual sources are still available for the Indus valley and the Indus script inscribed on archaeological effects remain undeciphered, the tribal and pastoral beginnings are reconstructed from the Sangam literature much in the same way as in the North from Vedic and Buddhist texts. Paradoxically, urban-industrial Indus valley civilization antedates the pastoral beginnings in the Vedic and Sangam periods, the former not very distant in time and place from the Indus valley. It may well be that the Indus culture was the metropolitan centre of the primitive peripheries of the same Indus state to which the pastoral Aryans migrated in hordes from Central Asia. This probably happened at a time when the metropolises were devastated by a natural calamity of great magnitude causing the peripheries to fall into a more primitive existence. Of course, we need historical evidence to corroborate these surmises.

Second, there is the transformation of regional kingdoms into subcontinental states through much of Indian history by a recurrent process of emergence, disintegration, and re-emergence. Beginning with the post-Vedic proto-states (*mahajanapadas*) and their transformation into states in the pre-Mauryan period, among whom Magadha under the rule of the Nandas was the centre of political gravity, the process culminated in the formation of the Maurya state (321-185 BC) in Magadha, the first subcontinental state in Indian history. The *saptang* theory of the state with seven constituent elements—monarch, ministers/bureaucrats, territory/population, fort, treasury, sceptre, and allies—outlined in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is commonly regarded as the textual blueprint of this transition. Indologist J.C. Heesterman argues that from the internal evidence of the text itself it appears that there were chinks in bureaucratic procedures, especially in audit and accounts, that betrayed tribal traces making the *mahamatyas* (accountants/auditors) co-sharers in royal powers rather than subordinate to the king. However, what Heesterman makes out to be co-sharing in royal power is easily amenable to an interpretation of autonomy of the officials in a technical field in the first most complex and extensive state in the world until that time. On the decline and disintegration of the Mauryan Empire, smaller kingdoms, and regional states followed that dotted the historical landscapes for a millennium and a half. This period witnessed the phenomenal increase in frequency of the land grants by the state to Brahmans and state officials. This practice resulted in the rise of feudalism. During this period, the important landmarks were the states founded by the Guptas and Harsha (300-700 AD), the Delhi Sultanate (1200-1526 AD), and Vijayanagara (1300-1526 AD). From the third decade of the 16th century to the beginning of the 18th the Mughal state ruled the roost over much of the subcontinent as the most important subcontinental state before the British colonial state that continued until independence in 1947. The Maratha and the Sikh states in the 18th century

were the two important states that followed the decline of the imperial Mughals, but they were overtaken by the British colonial state, to which the post-colonial Indian state is the most significant successor.

Third, there is, as already hinted above, the transformation of the 'state'¹ based on British colonial economy and bureaucratic organization into a democratic and sovereign nation-state. This state-system sets off the twin processes of industrialization and democratization that ushered India into the modern world. Western education and capitalist development in the industry were initiated by the British rulers in India that irreversibly undermined the Indian tradition. The British also laid the foundation of the first merit-based bureaucracy in India that replaced the patrimonial bureaucracy of the Mughal and post-Mughal states. All these trends gathered fuller momentum in the post-independence period.

Taking strands from British and Mughal conceptions of monarchical and patrimonial bureaucratic traditions, the British with some modifications erected the viceregal system with first modern structures of bureaucracy and army in India. The British Raj, thus, became the most developed absolutist state claiming to be benevolent in Indian history. Social and cultural historians generally perceive a great deal of continuity between the pre-colonial and colonial periods of Indian history.² However, a student of the modern state in India cannot escape discovering a major break in its political-institutional complex with the founding of the British Raj, even though the basically authoritarian viceregal system *prima facie* resembles the ancient and medieval Indian absolute monarchies rooted in the Hindu and Indo-Islamic political ideas. Indeed, by virtue of the British colonial heritage in South Asia, the successor states in the region became heirs to two strands of institutional legacies, those of the viceregal system and the Westminster model of parliamentary government in combination with federalism like Canada and Australia.³

During the Raj, however, it was the authoritarian strain of the institutional seed which was more in tune with the traditional state systems of India's past than with the modern British political heritage that flourished. For this reason, it would not be out of place to draw a comparison between the British colonial state in India and the absolutist states of late medieval Europe. Functionally, the colonial state in India was neither comparable to the Bonapartist or Prussian Junker state holding the balance between feudal aristocracy and emergent bourgeoisie⁴ nor the Andersonian model of European absolutist state which was essentially a reinforced apparatus of feudal domination of the peasantry.⁵ It did not either belong to the category of 'patrimonial authority'⁶ or 'patrimonial bureaucratic empire'.⁷ It was instead a political instrument of the British imperial or metropolitan capitalist state, and, for this reason, largely undetermined by the mode of production in colonial India. Much like the European absolutist state, the British Raj led to the onset of political and economic forces that produced for the first time in Indian history rational-legal structure of bureaucracy

in the Weberian mode. However, due to the crucial factor of colonial intervention in the Indian case the British Raj founded a colonial state dependent on the metropolitan state, but enjoying a large measure of autonomy from the class and ethnic configurations in the colony itself. The colonial state, thus, built up a system of power shaped by a coalition of the dominant classes in the metropolitan state in London supervising over a subordinate coalition of a dominant class—dominant vis-a-vis the colonial class configuration—the adversarial targets of the classes active in the nationalist movement against colonial rule. Thus, whereas the imperial state was functionally and reciprocally conditioned by the full-fledged twin processes of industrialization and democratization, the colonial state in India was ultimately an instrument of the imperial state, but as a state since it was secondarily influenced by the coalition of classes and ethnic groups in the colony. Only with this kind of conceptualization, we can: (1) bring out a sharper focus in the liberal strands in Anglo-American colonialism as distinguished from continental European colonialism; (2) do justice to the incrementally democratic features of constitutional reform in India introduced by the British Parliament pointing towards a parliamentary and federal form of government in the long run; and (3) underline the evolution of consensus during the nationalist movement in favour of the Westminster model and its adoption by Independent India's Constituent Assembly in 1950.

The long-term effect of the British rule both in the Company and the Crown phases was the gradual weakening of the traditional aristocracy (landed classes) and the rise of the middle classes that gradually filled the space vacated by the former. The middle classes 'included university students and teachers, barristers and lawyers, writers and newspaper editors, educated proprietors, and well-to-do traders'. Ironically, it was the princes and *zamindars*, who, after an initial revolt, remained allied with the British Raj, while the middle class (excepting those who joined the bureaucracy) forged an alliance with the Indian industrialists and the peasants against the British.

With the consolidation of the British rule in India, capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production came to co-exist in a dynamic state of transition to capitalism. This resulted in the gradual destruction of the age-old methods of peasant and craft production under an imperialist regime of capitalism geared to the colonial extraction or revenue and raw materials for metropolitan industrialization and imperial expansion and exploitation of the Indian market for the commodities produced by British industries. Besides, a class of indigenous capitalists within the colony also developed in due course as also a middle class of the new elites educated in colleges and universities established by the British rulers. The industrial working classes also slowly, but steadily emerged in the new industrial towns and cities. Colonial rule, thus, despite its pretentious notions of the 'whiteman's burden' and its extractive and exploitative nature, also

generated some unintended consequences, such as the rise of a nationalist movement that weaved a cluster of ethnic groups into a nation for the first time in Indian history, for, though a common cultural consciousness had existed from time immemorial, the nation-state was a modern phenomenon.

Now, moving from the Raj phase of the modern Indian state to its Swaraj phase, we must develop an understanding of the post-colonial Indian state in terms of its continuities and departures from the British Indian colonial state. On attaining political independence in 1947, India turned its back on two aspects of its colonial heritage: (1) the political-institutional legacies of the viceregal model of the bureaucratic state; and (2) the legacies of the political economy of dependency on metropolitan capitalist centres.

The modernizing nationalist elite established the framework of a liberal-democratic state with a parliamentary-federal government, constitutionally guaranteed Fundamental Rights of citizens, and an incipient welfare state promised in the Directive Principles of State Policy. The preamble of the Indian constitution proclaims it a 'sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic'. It would be a gross oversimplification to describe this state as an instrument of any dominant class or ethnic group. The Indian state derives its 'autonomy' (in democratic theory) or 'relative autonomy' (in the neo-Marxist theory) from its social/class base from the liberal-democratic constitution under which it has been founded as well as from the fact that, instead of any one class or group ruling over it, only a complex coalition of classes exercise dominance over it. Pranab Bardhan, an economist, argues that in one liberal-Marxist (or neo-Marxist) formulation, a conflict-ridden coalition of three 'dominant proprietary classes'-industrial capitalists, rich farmers, professionals (civil, military, and white-collar)-hold the key to political power in the Indian state. He goes on saying that a wide disparity separates this top two deciles from 'the bottom half of the population living in abject poverty', but the dominant coalition must contend with significant conflicts of interest' within its own ranks which have 'serious repercussions on the fortunes of economic growth, and of the democratic polity'.

To take the tack of the political economy of development, it is a commonplace that colonialism in India created some preconditions for economic and political development, but its primary upshot, beginning with the First World War, was this country's growing multilateral integration with advanced capitalist metropolitan centres of the West on the condition of dependency. On attaining freedom in 1947, the adoption of the Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy of economic development in the Second Five-Year Plan set the basic parameters of planning as rapid industrialization with the accent on a dominant public (state) sector and a self-reliant economy.

These strategies of political-institutional development and economic development together generated a complex dialectics with an immense

transformative potential. The principal components of this transformation were: (1) a restructuring of economic dependency on metropolitan capitalism into independent economic development; (2) promoting state capitalist and capitalist developments in the urban sector; (3) transition from semi-feudal agriculture to capitalist farming; and (4) democratization of a largely authoritarian society and polity to begin with, and once this made some headway, federalizing the predominantly parliamentary system established under the 1950 constitution.

Finally, a word about the two major directions of change affecting the Indian state since the 1990s and the unfolding future. Both are related to the somewhat contradictory global trends of economic and political liberalization that gathered momentum in the late 1970s and 1980s. In the Indian context, these developments are manifested on two planes. There is, first the policy of economic liberalization. And, secondly, there are the mounting pressures, for federalizing the predominant parliamentary system to accommodate a greater degree of autonomy for the states in the Indian federal union. Powerful alternative ideologies favouring the market and state governments have come to the fore, though the public sector and the Centre still continue to be powerful yet a series of policy changes have withdrawn, to a significant degree, controls that the state exercised over the private corporate sector and sought to reorient the hitherto inward-looking import-substitution economy by one in which a growing reliance is placed on the private sector, both national and multinational. The new policy thrust has resulted from a constellation of factors in the post-Nehru era, for example, as policy failure on economic front in the public sector bedevilled by huge losses, inefficiency, political populism, and corruption; success of the private sector in industry and agriculture; the emergence of a middle class and a new generation of political elites at the top with favourable orientations towards the Western pattern of capitalist development and consumerism, and so on.

The federalization thrust was earlier broadly confined to the regional elites and the state party systems. The regionalist thrust was buttressed by the rise of 'bullock capitalists' (the term is the Rudolph's, 1987) and the 'Other Backward Classes' (read castes) since the late 1960s. These social and political forces succeeded in pressurizing the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to appoint the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations in 1983, which submitted its monumental two volume report in 1987-88. In the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the national party system assumed a multi-partisan pattern, breaking out of the mould of a basically predominant party system under the aegis of the Congress party holding the sway most of the time since Independence. The mid-term parliamentary elections in May-June 1991, by and large, maintained the multi-party system of polarized pluralism introduced by the previous Lok Sabha elections in 1989.⁸ The federalizing thrust of the new phase of the party system continued unabated through the 1990s and mid-2020s. This makes the search for a new federal consensus an urgent imperative.

II

In this section, we would sketch the historical roots of the post-colonial Indian state. From the beginning, two contradictory as well as complementary patterns of state formation developed simultaneously in Indian history that was continued even by the mighty British colonial state. Centralized bureaucratic administration with direct rule in the territorial core was always complemented by non-bureaucratic modes of incorporation that contended with indirect rule by the central authority in the peripheries. This overarching framework of domination allowed a complex coexistence of the secular and the sacred, the pan-Indian and the region at sovereign cults, like *Dhama* and *sulb-i-kul* and spiritual cults like *Bhakti* and *Sufi silsilas*, a great tradition in culture and small-group orientations of the village society. Thus, sovereignty in Indian history was ambivalently both crystallized and diffused, centralized and decentralized; it not only allowed appreciable autonomies to groups and regions within the state but also visualized a complex interstate alliance system in the subcontinental interstate configuration in which allies were constituents of the subcontinental super state itself. The network of the federal and state governments established under the 1950 constitution is the first state to rule India directly under a common framework of modern political bureaucratic and economic institutions.

The post-colonial liberal-democratic state in India has sprung from complex historical roots such as these. The immediate inspiration for the democratic, federal and bureaucratic features of the state was, of course, the British rule in India and the British, Canadian, American, Irish, and Australian constitutions. However, the indigenous sociological and ideological influences of the Mughal and Maratha states, the nationalist movement, and the given structures of ethnicity should not be lost sight of. The Mauryan *mahamatta* system and the Mughal *mansabdari* system provide historical antecedents of the British Indian Civil Service and the post-independence all-India services. The ritual sovereignty of the Vijayanagara monarchs, Maratha diarchy between the nominal monarch and the hereditary *Peshwa* (premier) and the *ajnapatra* (ordinance) on the eve of the Maratha conquest in the 18th century, which ordains a 'dualist' authority of 'warriors' and 'ministers' in the administration, may be seen as the indigenous precedent of liberalization of the state structure that may have probably led to the denouement of 'constitutionalism' even without the British and nationalist interventions. The long-span nationalist movement against the colonial rule, that made a moderate appearance in the last quarter of the 19th century and passed through several phases, engendered a pervasive ideological debate and produced a consensus on the constitution and the policy-frame and planning in the new nation. The sprawling caste system and religious and linguistic communities make India a nation of minorities, despite the Hindu majority and the near-majority of Hindi speakers federally. All these legacies and factors together make India an exciting experiment in democracy, economic development, and nation-building.