

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WAITING FOR THE PEOPLE: COLONIALISM AND THE IDEA OF DEMOCRACY IN  
INDIA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

NAZMUL SAGAR SULTAN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2020

# Waiting for the People: Colonialism and the Idea of Democracy in India

## *Table of Contents*

<b>Abstract</b>	iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	vii
<b>Introduction</b>	
Waiting for the People	1
<b>Chapter One</b>	
A Hierarchy of Peoples: Colonialism and the Rise of Developmentalism in the Nineteenth Century	43
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
The Birth of the People: Colonial Liberalism and the Origins of the Anticolonial Democratic Project	87
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
The Colonial Paradox of Peoplehood: Swaraj and the Gandhian Moment	136
<b>Chapter Four</b>	
Between the Many and the One: Anticolonial Federalism and Popular Sovereignty	176
<b>Chapter Five</b>	
“Discovery” of the People: Postcolonial Founding and the Idea of Independence	214
<b>Epilogue</b>	
The Futures of Anticolonial Democratic Thought	265
<b>Bibliography</b>	283

## **Abstract**

In the course of the expansion of European imperialism and anticolonial resistance through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, democracy emerged as the undisputed normative ideal on a global scale. The ideal of democracy had been the professed goal of the anticolonial project since the late nineteenth century, while the developmental discourses of imperial legitimation also relied on the language of democracy. Against this backdrop, anticolonial political thinkers took it upon themselves to not just reclaim the sovereignty denied to the colonized but also to address the theoretical assumptions that rendered democracy compatible with empire. Focusing on colonial India, this dissertation offers a new interpretation of the anticolonial democratic project. In so doing, it also asks: what exactly happened to the idea of democracy when it went global?

The dissertation contends that the discourse of popular sovereignty is central to understanding the global career of democracy. The political articulation of the developmental turn in nineteenth-century European thought crucially hinged on the figure of the people. The dissertation demonstrates that the two seemingly separate historical developments—the rise of popular sovereignty in Europe and imperial rule in Asia and Africa—combined to establish a novel defense of colonialism in the nineteenth century. The ideals of sovereign peoplehood—one, undivided, and “fit” for political participation—came to facilitate a “democratic” justification of colonialism.

The imperial denial of Indian self-rule on the ground of its popular backwardness led anticolonial thinkers to repeatedly ask: what narratives of historical development are built into modern theories of democracy and what role do they play in practices of self-rule? I trace how a number of anticolonial thinkers pluralized (B.N. Seal, R.K. Mukerjee), rejected (M.K. Gandhi), and critically appropriated (Dadabhai Naoroji, Jawaharlal Nehru, B.R. Ambedkar) the

developmental narratives constitutive of modern democracy. The effort to disentangle modern democracy from its deep-seated developmental and progressive assumptions, I argue, defined the anticolonial democratic project. Yet it also placed anticolonial thinkers in a privileged position to rethink the modern ideal of popular sovereignty and its implication for democratic rule. Anticolonial political thinkers thus questioned the validity of theorizing the people as a “collective will” or as a sovereign entity detached from the enterprise of government. The dissertation ultimately argues that the critical tradition of Indian anticolonial thought was driven by the insight that the enactment of democracy in the colonial world requires not just the overcoming of empire but also the political ideals imprisoned in the developmental picture of the globe.

The first two chapters reframe the problem of colonialism in the history of political thought. Reading G.W.F. Hegel and J.S. Mill together in the imperial context of the nineteenth century, Chapter 1 argues that the turn to the framework of historical development replaced and departed from human-centric or purely societal approaches to colonial difference. I suggest that Hegel’s theorization of development as global, connected, and contradiction-driven captured this new philosophical shift in nineteenth-century thought. The chapter then shows how the disqualification of Indian sovereignty on the premise of its absent peoplehood allowed for shoring up the normative validity of representative democracy while legitimating imperial rule abroad. In the process, the political map of the nineteenth century transformed into a global hierarchy of peoplehood. The second chapter explores the formation of the global scope of popular sovereignty from the vantage point of nineteenth-century Indian political thought. Nineteenth-century liberalism—imperial as well as Indian—drove a wedge between the two prongs of modern democracy: self-government (understood as popular participation in

government) and popular sovereignty. Working within this divide, Indian liberals defined “self-government” as the political participation of the “advanced” sections of the people, while anchoring it in the liberal promise of empire. The result was an affirmation of the sovereign authority of the British people at the expense of further deferring Indian peoplehood.

The third chapter theorizes the colonial paradox of peoplehood that Indian anticolonial thinkers grappled with in their attempts to conceptualize self-rule, or *swaraj*. The persistence of the developmentalist figuration of the people brought the *swaraj* theorists in confrontation with the not-yet claimable figure of the people at the very moment of disavowing the British claim to rule. Revisiting this underappreciated pre-Gandhian history of the concept of *swaraj* and reinterpreting its Gandhian moment, this chapter offers a new reading of Gandhi’s theory of moral self-rule. I argue that Gandhi simultaneously rejected the developmental framework and the very criterion of popular authorization. The result was a displacement of the source of political action from the collective to the self. In so doing, the chapter theorizes the political dimension of Gandhi’s otherwise moral theory of action and recovers the conceptual innovation that turned the eccentric Mahatma into one of the most influential anticolonial thinkers of the twentieth century.

Recovering a largely forgotten body of pluralist political thought from early twentieth-century India, the fourth chapter studies how the question of popular sovereignty shaped the federalist reconfiguration of anticolonial democracy. Through a sustained engagement with British pluralist and American progressive thought, Indian federalist thinkers developed a many-willed conception of the people to overcome the rejection of Indian peoplehood on grounds of lack of nationhood and historical backwardness. However, the alternative source of sovereignty the federalists pointed to—plural and many-willed—stood in tension with their simultaneous

pursuit of a people speaking in one voice. In this way, the constitutive tension of the pluralist conception of sovereignty came strikingly alive in the colonial world.

The fifth chapter revisits the moment of the postcolonial founding—a much-misunderstood episode of anticolonial political thought. This chapter focuses on the political thought of Jawaharlal Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar. Nehru mapped the parallel between scarce and abundant futures onto the distinction between destitute masses and the people of the future. This allowed Nehru to attribute the agency for resistance to the not-yet people, while drawing the authorization of the centralized planning state from the claim of a developed future. Nehru’s vision of postcolonial sovereignty ultimately turned out to be a hope for sovereignty over the time of development itself. Ambedkar offered a powerful critique of the Nehruvian project of postcolonial founding, especially its folding of the problem of group conflicts into a progressive narrative of historical development. The chapter concludes by suggesting that Ambedkar’s proposal to accommodate group conflicts at the political level perspicaciously resisted the assumption that historical development could address the problem of a splintered social.

The epilogue of the dissertation considers the postcolonial career of democracy and development in the once-colonized world. Given the historical co-constitution of development and democracy in the postcolonial world, I argue that it is neither sufficient to offer a narrow democratic defense of development nor is it satisfactory to displace the question of democracy itself onto the dispute over development. In contrast, I suggest that the philosophical insight and political creativity of anticolonial political thinkers consisted in their questioning of the developmental terms and conditions of popular sovereignty—and the conception of the globe that underpins it.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have incurred many debts while writing this dissertation. The co-chairs of the dissertation committee—Patchen Markell and Jennifer Pitts—guided the project with generous engagement and abundant encouragement. Patchen taught me to think about political theory in a way that is both historically sensitive and theoretically bold. His astute reading and insightful feedback improved each chapter of the dissertation immeasurably. Jennifer has been a model of intellectual responsibility and rigor. She shared her wealth of knowledge in empire and the history of political thought at every step of the way, and always nudged me in more fruitful directions. Linda Zerilli has supported my work since the first year of graduate school. I am grateful to her for constantly reminding me of the broader stakes of the project. Adom Getachew joined the committee at a later stage but offered crucial suggestions at every critical juncture of the project, from the very start. Her keen insights into the history of anticolonial political thought and perspicacious feedback improved the dissertation in countless ways. Finally, Dipesh Chakrabarty has been an indispensable interlocutor and a source of intellectual inspiration over the last six years. I am grateful to him for all the conversations we have had about the past and present of South Asia.

The project also benefitted from the suggestions of many other members of the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago. Sankar Muthu helped me find the right framing for the project in its early days. I also thank John McCormick, Gary Herrigel, and Lisa Wedeen for their advice and suggestions. Kathy Anderson's guidance made life at Pick Hall smooth and painless. In fellow political theorists Alex Haskins, Emily Katzenstein, Will Levine,, Tejas Parasher, and Lucas Pinheiro, I found a wonderful group of interlocutors and friends. I also thank Yuna Blajer de la Garza, Annie Heffernan, Dalaina Heiberg, Steven Klein, Ray Noll, and

Sam Zeitlin. In addition, I benefitted from conversations with a host of faculty and fellow graduate students from other departments: Thibaut d’Hubert, Suchismita Das, Supurna Dasgupta, Mannat Johal, Harini Kumar, Rochona Majumdar, William Mazzarella, Steven Pincus, Sanjukta Poddar, and Sayantan Saha Roy. Beyond Chicago, a number of political theorists and historians have engaged with the project and helped improve it. In particular, I would like to thank Dennis Dalton, Rohit De, Kevin Duong, Shruti Kapila, Alex Livingston, Karuna Mantena, Jeanne Morefield, Joshua Simon, Mrinalini Sinha, and James Tully. My undergraduate advisers—Leonard Feldman and Robyn Marasco—drew me to the world of political theory and have remained cherished mentors. Lennie Feldman offered helpful advice and suggestions whenever I needed it.

The dissertation would have been much harder to write without the Regenstein Library’s extraordinary collection of South Asian resources and assistance from its librarians. I must also thank the librarians at the Asiatic Society (Kolkata), British Library (London), National Library of India (Kolkata), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (Delhi), and National Archives of India (Delhi).

Nusrat Chowdhury has been a friend and interlocutor par excellence. Nusrat convinced me to pursue my graduate study at Chicago and has been a pillar of support ever since. She read multiple drafts of a number of chapters and offered invaluable feedback. I am grateful to Hasan Siddiqui for his engagement with the project and for his unerring advice on the many professional aspects of academic life. Finally, my debt to Shefali Jha is immeasurable. She read almost all of the dissertation, and unfailingly, posed sharp questions and offered keen insights. Shefali’s simultaneous attention to analytical clarity and aesthetic sensibility makes her among the best readers one could have.

Thomas Newbold has enlivened my time at Chicago with intellectual joy and warm friendship. Many of the arguments that go into the dissertation were first discussed with Thomas. His comradeship is invaluable, and his love for South Asian intellectual history, infectious. Krithika Ashok and Sannoy Das have been great friends during my last year at Chicago. The quarantine months would have been significantly more difficult without their care and friendship. Madeline Smith read parts of the dissertation. I thank her for the productive feedback, and for her friendship. Most of the dissertation was written on the fifth floor of the incomparable Regenstein Library. I owe special thanks to the “fifth-floor crew”—Sanjukta, Sayantan, Tejas, and Thomas.

My friends in New York— William Cheung, Imtiaz Hossain, Ahmed Shamim, and David Hancock Turner, among others—made me feel at home in the United States when I first moved here and have remained great friends and comrades ever since. Back in Bangladesh, I was fortunate to have made a remarkable group of friends during my brief undergraduate education at the University of Dhaka. In particular, Arastu Lenin Khan and Priyam Paul have never failed to keep in touch and have ensured that I do not drift too far away from home. They also generously helped me track down some archival materials.

Notwithstanding the many difficulties of life as recent immigrants, my parents have patiently and lovingly supported my academic journey. My siblings—Sharmin, Nasrin, and Anzim—have borne most of my share of family responsibilities all while maintaining a keen interest in my work. None of this would be possible without their support.

## Introduction

### *Waiting for the People*

In 1887, still the early years of organized anticolonial politics in colonial India, Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932) observed that “the name of the *people* is nowhere to be found... [in] the glorious annals of the Hindoo and Mahomedan periods of Indian history [which] have recorded the achievements of priests and princes, of skillful generals and wise statesmen.” Pal surmised that “the *Indian people*” simply did not exist as a political entity prior to British rule. For all his discontent with the colonial state, the soon-to-be “high priest of Indian nationalism” concluded that the Indian people are being “called into existence” by the British.<sup>1</sup> By this point, Pal’s argument was widely shared by political thinkers across the colonial divide. Two decades before Pal, in the 1860s, Edwin Arnold, a nineteenth-century historian of British India and a noted Indologist, proudly claimed: “We are making a people in India where hitherto there have been a hundred tribes but no people... We are introducing an idea unknown to the East, as it was unknown to Europe before commerce—the idea of popular rights and equality.”<sup>2</sup> Hidden in his mammoth history of Governor Dalhousie’s regime in India, Arnold’s celebration of the democratic “contribution” of colonialism was very much a distillation of what foundational British political thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and Thomas Babington Macaulay had already helped establish. Yet, the Indian people—despite its putative historical non-being— came to lie at the heart of political struggle and intellectual dispute over the meaning of democracy in colonial India.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal, *Indian National Congress* (Lahore: Anarkali, 1887), 7 (original emphasis).

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Arnold, *Marquis of Dalhousie’s Administration of British India*, vol. 2 (London: Saunders, Otley & Co, 1865) 388.

The figure of the absent people cast a long shadow over the making of modern political thought in colonial India. The anticolonial democratic project would be fundamentally shaped by the perceived need to transform the historically “backward” and politically amorphous colonial “masses” into *the* people; I call this the problem of peoplehood. This was no mere challenge of constituting pre-existing groups into a cohesive people, for the political “qualities” of peoplehood appeared to be a product of historical development. The project of turning the masses into the people amounted to the transformation of the historical time that they inhabited. As a conceptual dilemma proper, this problem of peoplehood transcended its British uses as a legitimating trope. Almost all canonical anticolonial thinkers—ranging from Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925) to Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964)—struggled with the seemingly irrefutable premise of absent Indian peoplehood. Having offered compelling arguments for Indian self-rule, thinkers as different as Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) and Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) found themselves left with the “miserable” and “helpless” people yet to be developed enough to be sovereign. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), after submitting the draft constitution of the new republic of India, found it necessary to remind his audience that Indians are still not a people fit for democracy.<sup>3</sup> A few years into the postcolonial era, when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was asked, “What is your principal problem?” he replied with a curious answer, “We have got 360 million problems in India.”<sup>4</sup> The number, 360 million, was a reference to the then-estimated population of the newly independent state. The figure of the

---

<sup>3</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Three Historical Addresses of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation Research Cell, 1999), 54-55.

<sup>4</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “Three Hundred and Sixty Million Problems,” in *Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches*, vol. 3, March 1953-August 1957 (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958), 4.

people—the *sine qua non* of modern democracy—had turned out to be the marker of an enduring problem in the colonial world.

Contrary to commonplace narratives, the history of popular sovereignty in the colonial world was not simply one of sovereignty denied (by the colonizers) and reclaimed (by anticolonial actors). The structure of the “denial” inalterably transformed the meaning of democratic sovereignty and government even for the colonized. Modern colonialism was not simply a form of alien rule—or a new spin on the timeless trope of conquest. I argue instead that from the nineteenth century onward, colonialism was understood and justified in what might be called democratic terms. Central to the formation of modern colonialism had been the framework of developmentalism, which was more than the imperial promise of advancement. The developmental turn in the early nineteenth century signified global differences as commensurable and comparable in historicist terms, rendering the globe thinkable as a unified category. That colonialism was an undemocratic form of foreign rule was not necessarily questioned. Yet, the developmental vision built into colonialism became inseparable from the emergence of democracy as a globally legible category. Against this backdrop, anticolonial political thinkers took it upon themselves to not just reclaim the sovereignty denied to the colonized but also to address the theoretical assumptions that rendered democracy compatible with empire. This dissertation demonstrates that the entanglement between modern colonialism and democracy hinged crucially on the ideal of popular sovereignty. At once the ground and promise of colonialism, the figure of the people came to be central to Indian anticolonial thinkers’ search for democracy in a world deemed unfit for self-rule.

## I. Popular Sovereignty Between the Metropole and the Colonies

The concepts of the people and of popular sovereignty more broadly, have been exceptionally contested topics in modern political thought. The conflicting series of propositions associated with the discourse of popular sovereignty propelled, rather than stymied, its emergence as the benchmark of modern democracy. Popular sovereignty thrived, as it were, on its many claimants and detractors. Reflecting on the revolutionary origins of popular sovereignty, Hannah Arendt speculated that “if this notion [*le peuple*] has reached four corners of the earth, it is not because of any influence of abstract ideas but because of its obvious plausibility under conditions of abject poverty.”<sup>5</sup> I do not share the assumption that “abstract ideas” of the people were unimportant in the global career of popular sovereignty, nor the purportedly universal political import of “abject poverty.”<sup>6</sup> However, Arendt’s underscoring of the singular global reach of the popular sovereignty discourse captures a point of utmost importance: if democracy has now acquired the status of the sole “secular claimant” of political legitimacy,<sup>7</sup> it is primarily because of the incontestability of the ideal of popular sovereignty. While representative and centralized forms of democratic government faced much skepticism in the global nineteenth and twentieth

---

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 94.

<sup>6</sup> Arendt elaborates on the parallel between decolonization and the French Revolution further in a recently published lecture from the mid-1960s. To be clear, my point is not to question Arendt’s salutary insight that “the conquest of poverty is a prerequisite for the foundation of freedom, but also that liberation from poverty cannot be dealt with in the same way as liberation from political oppression” (66). My aim is rather to question the assumption that material deprivation of the masses acquired the same political signification in the colonial world as it did in eighteenth-century France. See Hannah Arendt, “The Freedom to Be Free,” *New England Review* 38, no. 2 (2017): 56-69.

<sup>7</sup> On the rise of democracy as the sole “secular claimant” of legitimacy, see John Dunn, *Democracy: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005), 15. See also James T. Kloppenberg, *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

centuries, the sovereignty of the people, as an ideal, met with no meaningful normative challenge. After storming the heaven of sovereignty,<sup>8</sup> the “people” seemed to have conquered “the four corners of the earth”— sometime between the great eighteenth-century revolutions and mid-twentieth century decolonization, and somewhere behind the mainstage of social and economic history. As we shall see, this story of how the people came to be global was far more complicated and far from being a simple diffusionist exercise. The anticolonial claimants of popular sovereignty were locked in a conflict with the imperial norms which derived their legitimacy from a contesting, global order of hierarchical peoplehood. By the end of decolonization, however, there remained no doubt that popular sovereignty was the new global norm par excellence of the age.

The strength and ubiquity of popular sovereignty lies in its roots as a discourse of authorization, even as there is intense disagreement regarding how to conceptualize the people and its sovereignty. From liberal institutionalist to radical democratic theory, the principle of popular sovereignty operates as the ground that authorizes various claims to rule. Much of the contemporary theoretical dispute around popular sovereignty concerns not whether the people is the ultimate political authority, but rather how to enact and institutionalize the authority vested in the abstract figure of the people. Regardless of how critical of popular rule a contemporary liberal political thinker might be, the procedure of popular consent—which grounds the sovereignty of a constitutional state in the will of the people—is essential.<sup>9</sup> Radical democrats—

---

<sup>8</sup> For a history of how popular sovereignty co-opted and replaced the theory of divine kingship, see Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 17-93.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Holmes—one of the most articulate defenders of “liberal democracy” in the post-Cold War era—finds the idea that the people as a whole could be “unbound by law” as “unrealistic.” But he also notes that liberal democracy takes “popular consent” to be the only morally justified

while overwhelmingly critical of representative democracy—articulate their extra-institutional vision of democracy through the figure of the people.<sup>10</sup> For all their attempts to render the people as “subjectless forms of communication circulating through forums and legislative bodies,” deliberative democratic theorists too find it necessary to account for a procedural authorization of rights and laws in the will of the people.<sup>11</sup> To be clear, what exactly constitutes popular authorization—and how it must be politically instituted—is an exceedingly contentious topic.<sup>12</sup> What has come to be beyond dispute, barring some residual protestations,<sup>13</sup> is the idea that democratic legitimacy requires an authorization from the people.

The distinction between sovereignty and government was crucial to the formation of modern popular sovereignty as an authorizing ideal. The concept of sovereignty, since its medieval origin, had implied that “authorizing the actions of a government” is not the same as “governing.”<sup>14</sup> Sovereignty thus means not so much the holding of political offices but rather the

---

source of power. See Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); see also, David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> For representative accounts, see Sheldon Wolin, “Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy,” in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* eds. Peter Euben and John Wallach (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 29-58; Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” in *Dissensus* (NY: Continuum Press, 2010), 35-52.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Popular Sovereignty as a Procedure,” in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions Toward a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), 463-490. See also, Seyla Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity: Human Rights in Troubled Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 77-93, 117-137

<sup>12</sup> For a mapping of the debate, see Bonnie Honig, “Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (2007): 1-17.

<sup>13</sup> For one such recent example, see Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), x; The key source here is Jean Bodin—see Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, trans. Mark Tooley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 25-50, 84-95,

power to decide who would constitute the government and make the laws. As Richard Tuck has shown, the possibility of a popular authorization of government (whether democratic or otherwise) was constitutive of the concept of sovereignty since Jean Bodin and ran through canonical modern political philosophers ranging from Thomas Hobbes to the abbé Sieyès. The very emergence of a constitutional theory of public authority in the early modern era was likewise indebted to the incipient doctrine of popular sovereignty. The limited government of the constitutional order had become theoretically possible owing to the “unlimited” power ascribed to the people.<sup>15</sup> It was, however, only with the two classical revolutions of the late eighteenth century—French and American—that popular sovereignty began to acquire the public legitimacy that it now enjoys. The French and American revolutionaries vigorously debated over the meaning of popular sovereignty, taking paths that were neither identical nor short of novel challenges. Still, the limited government of American constitutionalism and the transformative vision of French republicanism remained rooted in the powerful idea that the people are the source of political authority.

For all its centrality to the modern constitutional order, popular sovereignty has been no less salient to extra-constitutional claims of political authorization. The invocation of popular sovereignty both by institutional and extra-institutional actors, as Jason Frank has argued, is enabled by the fact that the people is more of a claim than a determinate object. The “constitutive surplus” of popular sovereignty—the surplus that remains despite constitutional and institutional authorization derived from the people—continues to be a reservoir for popular claim-making in

---

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Lee, *Popular Sovereignty in Early Modern Constitutional Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-23.

the age of democracy.<sup>16</sup> Given that modern democracy rode the waves of many popular insurrections, the originary power associated with the people was formative of both the institutional ideals and dictions of popular politics. To complicate the matter further, the essential claimability of the people means that both governmental and extra-governmental actors could invoke the name of the people, thus transcending strict constitutional protocols for popular authorization. The insurrectionary people no doubt coexists with the specter of the riotous mob. The “strong cleanser of rationality and the stiff brush of virtue” notwithstanding, the people has proved to be an idea hard to sanitize,<sup>17</sup> resisting its circumscription to either constitutional or extra-constitutional guises. While the power of the people might seem to be anchored in a naturalized “folk foundationalism,”<sup>18</sup> the plural purchase of popular sovereignty is more than a symptom of its intellectual deficiency. The concept of the people works as more of a “bedrock” (in a Wittgensteinian sense) than as a transparent epistemic foundation: it is the ground where “the spade turns” not so much because it is an intrinsically self-justifying foundation but rather because it is “held fast by what lies around.”<sup>19</sup> That is, the idea of the people operates as the legitimating ground for almost all modern democratic norms— from the constitution to routine electoral politics. This is what constitutes the “self-evident” character of popular sovereignty in

---

<sup>16</sup> Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Post-Revolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Patchen Markell, “The Mob, the People, and the Political: Rereading *The Origins of Totalitarianism*” (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Olson, *Imagined Sovereignties: The Power of the People and other Myths of the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §217; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (London: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), §144.

the modern period. Epistemic coherence is thus the wrong demand to make of the concept of the people.

It is, therefore, no surprise that popular sovereignty also riddled the modern history of colonialism and anticolonial resistance in all its messiness. However, the emergence of the people in the colonial world was neither historically parallel nor conceptually analogous to the European experience. The beginning of the British conquest of India in the mid-eighteenth century triggered thorny questions of sovereignty and legitimacy, leading to Edmund Burke's famous trial of Warren Hastings and the larger "scandal of empire."<sup>20</sup> The framework of ancient constitutionalism shaped the terms of dispute concerning what gave the British the right to rule over India in the first few decades of British rule in India.<sup>21</sup> As the self-understanding and legitimating discourses of colonialism went through a transformation in the early nineteenth century, the question of the people slowly emerged as the main framework for sovereign authorization. The colonial birth of popular sovereignty was less centered on the eighteenth-century debates around democracy ancient and modern; rather, it was born out of a deep-seated anxiety around (European) democracy and (non-European) despotism.

British imperial liberal thinkers—central, at once, to the history of nineteenth-century political thought and to the history of colonialism at a global scale—recognized the incompatibility of their commitments to representative democracy with the foundations of colonial rule abroad. The category of the people turned out to be central to the reconciliation of the two norms that ruled over two parts of the world: the despotic foundation of colonial rule was

---

<sup>20</sup> See Nicholas Dirks, *Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> See Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

claimed to be legitimate because the colonized were not yet a people who could authorize self-government. The imperial liberals, of course, had no monopoly over the colonial administration which more often than not succumbed to brute domination suspending the promise of development.<sup>22</sup> What instead offered such an enduring life to imperial liberalism is its widespread purchase among Indians themselves. The significant Indian excitement over the diffusion of modern knowledge from the second quarter of the nineteenth century onward had no doubt regarding its “object”: “[the improvement of] the minds of the natives of India as a people.”<sup>23</sup> The urgency attributed to the “improvement” of the masses directly pertained to the incipient hope of instituting self-government in India. In the process, the colonial subjection of India turned out to be more than a mere foreign despotism; it also became the necessary historical conclusion of India’s absent peoplehood.

“The people,” argues Bernard Yack, “exists in a kind of eternal present. It never ages or dies.”<sup>24</sup> Though Yack notes that the concept of the people is of relatively modern origin, its conceptual significance, he contends, is primarily spatial, not temporal. In its global unfolding, the concept of the people, on the contrary, has been entangled in temporal—or to be more specific, developmentalist—concerns. To be sure, in normative and constitutional reasoning, the people features as a given entity whose boundary and will is to be determined and translated institutionally. While one might dispute who the “real” people are and what their authority entails, the question as to the *existence* of the people is not a problem that one is ordinarily faced

---

<sup>22</sup> See Jon Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India, 1780-1835* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Jugannath Sunkersett quoted in Bimanbehari Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas* (Calcutta: Bookland Private Ltd., 1967 [1934]), 195.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Yack, “Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism,” *Political Theory* 29, no. 4 (2001): 517-536.

with. In the colonial world, however, the name of the people was replete with temporal markers; its conceptual birth strangely amounted to its historical absence.

Liberal imperialist thinkers maintained that modern peoplehood is historically produced, not naturally given. British liberals such as John Stuart Mill were not unaware of the performative dimension of modern peoplehood—i.e., the idea that sovereign peoplehood has to be politically enacted through institutional and public mediums. But, on their view, performances of peoplehood were only possible in a historically developed state. Developmental fitness, therefore, operated as the condition of possibility for democratic politics. In colonial India, the absent figure of the people came to descriptively embody the historical backwardness ascribed to the colonies. Normatively, the perceived inadequacy of colonial peoplehood helped legitimate the suspension of Indian sovereignty. The socioeconomic lack attributed to the people directly undermined the people as a “political abstraction.”<sup>25</sup> If, in the modern Western history of popular sovereignty, the sociological deprivation and historical subjection of the people bolstered the argument concerning their unrealized sovereignty, these same phenomena would be deployed to disqualify the sovereign claim of the people in the colonial context.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, representations of mass underdevelopment pervaded colonial Indian political thought: expressions such as “the starving millions” or “ignorant” masses bled into the characterization of the colonized people as politically unfit. The diversity of India across regional and religious lines also acted as an evidence of the absence of a unified entity called the Indian people.

---

<sup>25</sup> On the two images of the people, see Pierre Rosanvallon, “Revolutionary Democracy,” in *Democracy Past and Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 79-97; Sheldon Wolin, “People’s Two Bodies,” *Democracy* 1, no. 1 (1981): 9–24.

<sup>26</sup> For a classic statement, see Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* In *Political Writings*, ed. Michael Sonenscher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 94–144; see also Arendt, *On Revolution*, 53–110

In established accounts of anticolonial political thought, the nationalist claim to popular sovereignty is understood to be central to overturning imperial sovereignty, with little or no differentiation between the “nation” and the “people.”<sup>27</sup> This dissertation presents a different story. The category of nationhood does not capture the democratic dilemma that was constitutive of modern colonialism. From Bipin Chandra Pal to Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian political thinkers, despite their patent “anticolonial nationalism,” struggled to posit sovereign authority in the Indian people. The claim of nationhood was not the same as the claim of peoplehood, for the latter had to be made admissible in the developmental terms of democratic fitness. Indian thinkers could not simply deny the imperial fabric of their intellectual resources nor could they claim the atemporal universality of popular sovereignty, turning a blind eye to their all too temporalized colonial existence. What they did—and what this dissertation narrates—is question the terms and times of modern popular sovereignty, and the meaning of democracy itself.

## II. **Empire and the Question of Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought**

Adam Smith famously characterized the twin events of “the discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope” as two of the “greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind.”<sup>28</sup> The archive of modern European political thought faithfully reflects the force of Smith’s observation. The empire question, however, was never static or self-evident, despite the obvious continuity of the themes of conquest and

---

<sup>27</sup> For a representative account, see Bipin Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979); For a methodologically critical of the nationalist framework that nevertheless leaves the nation-people distinction unproblematized, see Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), 416.

colonization.<sup>29</sup> The many material and intellectual problems traveling to and from the non-European world normatively challenged the natural law framework, gave impetus to the age of enlightenment and shaped the cores of the developmentalist paradigm. European political thinkers before and after Smith, from Francisco de Vitoria to Karl Marx, directly or indirectly reckoned with the ineluctable problem of empire. It is thus a matter of curiosity that colonialism found no meaningful place in the discipline of political theory in the twentieth century—an age of global democracy marked by innumerable anticolonial rebellions and founding. This theoretical obsolescence of colonialism, as we shall see in the fifth chapter, had much to do with the political success of anticolonial movements. The rise of new postcolonial states, along with the normative codification of the right to self-determination in the international domain, had seemingly settled the question of colonialism. Colonialism had evidently become reducible to a “morally objectionable form of political relation”: the unjust domination of one people over another.<sup>30</sup>

In cognate disciplines such as history and anthropology, the rise of postcolonial studies breathed a new life into the study of colonialism. Historians, in particular, have debated over the exact manner in which colonialism constituted a break with the precolonial past and the new

---

<sup>29</sup> See Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); For a historically grounded exploration of the empire question in modern political theory, see Sankar Muthu, ed., *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Lea Ypi, “What’s Wrong with Colonialism,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2013): 158-191. My aim is not to question Ypi’s powerful arguments establishing the normative wrong of colonial rule. Instead, I want to underscore how the justification of colonialism in the nineteenth century complicated the very possibility of a straightforward moral critique of empire. I elaborate on this point in the following page.

forms of practice globalized through colonial governmentality.<sup>31</sup> The ensuing reconsideration of colonial statehood and imperial ideology further established that colonialism could neither be reduced to universal sociology nor be analytically circumscribed to the realm of exceptions. In the wake of the postcolonial turn, political theorists too recuperated the central role that the question of empire played in the formation of modern political thought. The extraordinary confidence with which European empires ruled over the world turned out not to be unrelated to the heartland of European intellectual preoccupations, be it liberalism or the rise of social theory. These developments brought the far-flung regions of the world once more into contiguity with the mainstream of modern political thought. Conceptual proximity, however, can be deceptive, for the archive of anticolonial political thought is often susceptible to interpretation as “answers” to the problems or blind spots of their European counterparts. As we shall see, there is no doubt that anticolonial thinkers often recognized the weak foundations of essentialist discourses such as “civilization” in contemporaneous European political thought. But what rendered their attempts to critique imperial thought a more challenging enterprise is the imperially inflected nature of democratic norms—the same norms which were at the center of anticolonial political claims since the nineteenth century also helped legitimate colonialism. The anticolonial answer to this

---

<sup>31</sup> Of note here is the debate between the postcolonial and “Cambridge” school (of South Asian history) scholars in final decade of the twentieth century. For an overview, see Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1475-490; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “A Small History of Subaltern Studies,” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 467-485; Nicholas Dirks, “The Burden of the Past: On Colonialism and the Writing of History,” in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 303-316; Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (1992): 141-167.

problem, as a result, required an interrogation of the very normative foundations of modern democracy.

The lesson of the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill noted revealingly, was to historicize the “ought”: “different stages of human progress not only *will* have (which must always have been evident), but *ought* to have, different institutions.”<sup>32</sup> The norms were not to be simply relativized; one norm was universal, the other was provisional. Despotism, on this view, could be necessary at a given stage of historical development *for* the sake of democracy itself. Neither perceptive liberal imperialists like Mill nor Indian thinkers ignored the patent despotism of colonial rule. Mill, in particular, theorized representative government to be a form of rule that required “will and capacity” among the people for its actualization.<sup>33</sup> The colonies such as India appeared unfit for democracy primarily because of the historical deficit of a set of democratic qualities in the people—e.g., respect for laws, public spirit, institutionalism, and so on. Conversely, what entitled the British to rule over India was not simply civilizational superiority; more specifically, it pertained to their claim to be a people *historically* advanced and trained in representative government. In other words, the developmental and progressive account of colonialism could operate as a discourse of political legitimation because of its translation into terms of peoplehood. In this way, nineteenth-century colonialism not only acknowledged its own violation of norms but derived its legitimacy precisely from that very acknowledgment.

---

<sup>32</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, vol. 1- Autobiography and Literary Essays*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 169 (original emphasis).

<sup>33</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, vol. XIX- Essays on Politics and Society Part 2*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 413.

In the global nineteenth century, democracy was neither simply a humanistic category nor merely a problem of reason and cognition. Whether we look at Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* or Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government*, democracy was ineluctably mired in the doubt concerning its own historical conditions. The pioneering works on liberal imperialism have pointed out the intimacy between the liberal commitment to progress and imperialism in a number of canonical nineteenth-century thinkers.<sup>34</sup> The relative absence of the question of democracy in the liberal imperialism scholarship has lately received scrutiny. In a recent work on popular sovereignty and the making of American settler-colonialism, Adam Dahl contrasted the "antidemocratic imperialism" of British liberalism to the "democratic imperialism" of settler colonialism.<sup>35</sup> While Dahl rightly emphasizes the mutual imbrication between native "dispossession" and popular sovereignty in the settler-colonial context, my reading of liberal imperialist thought does not find a contradiction between "liberal" and "democratic" projects of imperialism. I suggest that the liberal-imperialist uses of developmentalism were reconciled with democracy by way of rendering the people a category dependent on historical development. The political location of a people thus could be evaluated

---

<sup>34</sup> See, in particular, Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Liberal Imperialism in Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); the discourse of "improvement" also shaped the adoption of the colonial model in the domestic context of the Euro-American world, though it was driven by a set of commitments not reducible to the imperial-liberal frameworks—on this point, see Barbara Arneil, *The Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

<sup>35</sup> Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democracy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 8.

in reference to their relative historical distance or proximity to the ideal of (representative) democracy. In so doing, I recast the question of empire and liberalism in terms of democracy. The question of democracy in the nineteenth century had two different dimensions: (self-) government and (popular) sovereignty. The developmental conception of peoplehood allowed for disqualifying “native” self-government, since the colonized appeared to not meet the conditions of sovereign peoplehood. On this view, pre-mature adoptions of representative government could only accentuate tyranny among a people not yet fit to be sovereign.<sup>36</sup> For the liberal imperialists, the normative commitment to representative government necessitated its own disavowal in the colonies. The liberal-imperialist discourse of development thus essentially performed a “democratic” justification of colonialism.

The progressive reconciliation between the despotic fact of colonialism and ideal norm of democracy was born out of what we might conceptualize as the developmental resolution of global difference. The eighteenth-century discourses of the conjectural narrative of humanity and naturalist teleology quickly eclipsed in the early nineteenth century. In their stead, the discourse of historical development emerged as the new framework for approaching the question of the colonies. As the dissertation shows, this developmental shift was inextricably linked to the attempts to find one unified global process underlying divergent social practices and intellectual traditions. Thanks to the combined effort of historians, political economists, philosophers and geographers, Europe and the colonies came to be hierarchically integrated and thus could be interpreted together. Although colonialism, in political terms, divided the globe into two, its theoretical commitments relied on global oneness. The upshot of such a developmental vision of the world was that the colonies now acquired a double significance: they were politically

---

<sup>36</sup> Mill, *Considerations*, 378, 416.

subjected and historically signified as backward peoples. Out of this developmental turn would emerge a novel understanding of colonialism: the rule of a historically advanced people over a backward one. The colonies were no longer either merely other or immediately identifiable with Europe. They had become the prehistory of Europe itself—a developmental distance that simultaneously allowed for political domination and theoretical internalization.

### III. The Colonial Problem of Peoplehood

Vladimir: ...What do we do now?

Estragon: Wait.

Vladimir: Yes, but while waiting.”

(Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*)<sup>37</sup>

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the promise of transforming the colonial masses into the people emerged as the main British claim to rule over India. The yearly report of the colonial state was published under the suggestive title of “moral and material progress in India.” The developmental project, however, was no longer a British concoction grafted onto Indian society. By the mid-nineteenth century, the intellectual climate of urban centers was awash in various projects of “social reform.” Myriad reflections on developmentalism saturated the sociological, historical, and moral imaginations of the age.<sup>38</sup> The anticolonial democratic project would take shape against this backdrop.

---

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 86.

<sup>38</sup> See Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 30-39; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 35-115; Brian Hatcher, *Idioms of Improvement: Vidyāsāgar and Cultural Encounter in Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

As Indian political thinkers began to make claims for democratic self-rule, the anticolonial project would become absorbed in a recurring question: what are the political qualities that could transform an amorphous mass into the people? This was a necessary question concerning the formation of the democratic subject, and yet it reinforced the premise of colonial rule. From moral to material underdevelopment, the state of colonial peoplehood seemed to contradict the political ground on which contemporary Euro-American democracies were standing. To be clear, the “people” that nineteenth-century Indian thinkers found wanting is not so much an insurrectionary crowd, for the era was rife with the news of peasant insurgencies.<sup>39</sup> Such “pre-political” actors only affirmed the overwhelming discourse of the Indian unfitness for self-government.<sup>40</sup> It was instead the people underlying representative government—a “fit” authority that grounds self-government through their political will and institutional competence—that informed the nineteenth-century Indian accounts of an absent peoplehood. Understood primarily as “indirect sovereignty” in nineteenth-century British thought,<sup>41</sup> popular sovereignty preceded the question of representation. Thus, even as Victorian British politics itself was dominated by concerns of diverse and proportional representation,<sup>42</sup> the colonial question remained stuck at the prior requirement of popular fitness.

---

<sup>39</sup> See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3-23.

<sup>41</sup> On this point, see Duncan Kelly, “Popular Sovereignty as State Theory in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, eds. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 270-296.

<sup>42</sup> See Gregory Conti, *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation: Representation, Deliberation, and Democracy in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Even so, the problem of peoplehood did not exactly block the political aspiration of nineteenth-century Indians. Throughout the latter half of the century, Indian political thinkers and actors relentlessly pushed for political participation in the colonial government and forged multiple strategies for persuading the British to concede Indian demands. The group of political thinkers who went on to found the Indian National Congress in 1885 shared one overarching goal: the gradual integration of Indians in the colonial administration. This particular mode of politics—variously characterized as “constitutional agitation,” “gradual reformism,” “political mendicancy” etc.—was directly tethered to a vision of a democratic future. Surendranath Banerjea suggestively recapitulated his generation’s fascination with the ideal of popular “enthronement” in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Banerjea was an ever-present figure in Indian political life for about half a century, roughly between the 1870s and 1920s. In his memoir, he keenly underscored the mutual imbrication between the early politics of gradual reformism and the ideal of “popular domination”:

“We not only wanted to be members of the bureaucracy and to leaven it with the Indian element, but we looked forward to controlling it, and shaping and guiding its measures and eventually bringing the entire administration under complete popular domination. It was a departure hardly noticed at the time, but [was] fraught with immense possibilities. Along with the development of the struggle for place and power to be secured to our countrymen, there came gradually but steadily to the forefront the idea this was not enough... The demand for representative government was now definitely formed.”<sup>43</sup>

The “place and power” concerned limited representation in the imperial government with the aim to prepare for a full self-government. This demand for Indian representation indeed became a

---

<sup>43</sup> Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making: Being the Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 67.

rallying cry of nineteenth-century Indian liberals.<sup>44</sup> But the colonial claim of representation had little to do with representing the will of the people; it was instead framed as a step toward actively shaping the people itself. Banerjea, Naoroji, and others articulated a distinctly developmental justification for Indian representation. It was only by participating in the government, the argument went, that “educated Indians” could learn to practice self-government. In turn, the “advanced” section of the Indian people would help prepare the “teeming” and “dumb millions” resigned to destitution.<sup>45</sup> The demand for limited representation received little vindication from the empire, nor did the attempts to institutionally influence state policies succeed. Some Indian actors such as Naoroji thus sought representation in the British Parliament, while others pursued additional means for appealing to the “English people” directly. The idea of directing political propaganda at the British people was expressive of a deeper predicament of nineteenth-century Indian political thought: the people who could authorize Indian demands resided in England, not in India.

In effect, the politics of appealing to the British people reverted the order commonly assumed between sovereignty and government. Notwithstanding all the disputes regarding the nature of the sovereignty-government distinction, the priority of the former over the latter since the eighteenth century has been more or less assumed in modern political thought. In the colonial world, however, (popular) sovereignty and (democratic) government were constitutively split. The entrance of Indians into imperial politics was through the framework of limited self-government, which was understood to be historically prior to popular sovereignty proper. Instead

---

<sup>44</sup> See Christopher A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-25.

<sup>45</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, *Essays, Speeches, Addresses, Writings* (Bombay: Caxton Printing Works, 1887), 295, 361, 112.

of self-government being premised on Indian sovereignty, it came to be the passage toward the growth of the latter. It is in this troubled political horizon that colonial “liberalism” flourished—or rather hoped to flourish. As Indian liberals sought to authorize their demand for limited self-government, they found themselves wittingly or unwittingly affirming the sovereignty of the British people at the expense of the not-yet Indian people. Therein lay the constitutive predicament of the colonial politics of representation.

The intensification of the demand for immediate self-government began to take place in the final decade of the nineteenth century and culminated with the emergence of a group of gifted thinkers and “impatient” political actors: Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghose, among others. Dadabhai Naoroji’s unexpected call for “swaraj” *without* delay in 1906—he understood this to be equivalent to a limited form of institutional self-government—sparked a wider demand for the Indian “control” of the government. The newfound urgency for self-government, however, anti-climactically laid bare the absent premise of popular sovereignty. Early twentieth-century Indian political thinkers drifted restlessly between the two poles of the political world—the present yet unacceptable imperial sovereignty and the normatively desirable yet absent popular sovereignty. For all their radicalism, neither Pal nor Tilak could invoke a sovereign people fit to authorize self-government. Closely reading this critical moment of Indian political thought, I demonstrate how the unavailability of colonial peoplehood consisted in its paradigmatic entanglement with the framework of developmentalism which saturated the space between the people as a descriptive and as a normative marker.

In their search for an authorizing ground for self-rule, the swaraj thinkers ended up either unhappily restoring the authority of imperial sovereignty or reluctantly deferring the time of popular sovereignty. This colonial paradox of peoplehood, which appeared in its most acute form

in the age of swaraj, ran through the long career of the anticolonial democratic project. The eminently claimable entity called the people turned out to be unclaimable in its colonial iteration. The name of the people—the modern marker of resistance—had become enmeshed in a fateful process of deferral. The structure of this unclaimability is what I call waiting for the people. The impasse of anticolonial politics underwritten by the trope of waiting for the people would prove to be hard to overcome, for it was neither a mere ideological obfuscation nor just a straightforward byproduct of political repression. This was also precisely the challenge that twentieth-century anticolonial political thinkers took up in their momentous efforts to dissociate modern democracy from its imperial moorings.

#### **IV. Self-Government, Popular Sovereignty and the Anticolonial Democratic Project**

Since the dramatic revelation of the crisis of popular authorization in the aftermath of the Calcutta Congress Session of 1906, Indian political thinkers began to confront directly the difficult task of recovering “sovereignty” from the troubled project of “self-government.” The necessity of rethinking the relationship between sovereignty and government would appear acutely in the course of seeking authorization for the anticolonial democratic project. As the question of sovereignty was tied up with the problem of peoplehood, the reexamination of the very concept of the people would prove to be pivotal to these different endeavors. The core of this dissertation is composed of studies of three theoretically innovative and politically consequential moments of anticolonial responses to the problem of peoplehood.

The political answer that transformed the historical course of anticolonial politics was from Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)—the most illustrious figure in the canon of Indian political thought. Gandhi, rather evidently, is a thinker of individual moral action. As a

result, his extraordinary role in democratizing the anticolonial movement had long perplexed historians of modern South Asia; the responses ranged from an interest-based explanation to accounts of Gandhi's free-floating signification among the peasants to various accounts of "spiritualization" of politics.<sup>46</sup> Gandhi entered into the Indian intellectual scene in the first decade of the twentieth century, with the publication of his powerful pamphlet *Hind Swaraj* in 1910. Before Gandhi's emergence, the world of Congress politics was split between the "moderates" still clinging onto gradual reformism and the "extremists" unable to summon authorization from what they took to be still underdeveloped Indian peoplehood. For Gandhi, the extremist claim to the Indian control over government shared the premise of development with the moderate subscription to the imperial script of gradual reformism. In his telling, the politics of waiting for the people suffered from the same externalization of authority that pervaded the practice of appealing to a remote imperial authority. Through a close reading of *Hind Swaraj*, I suggest that his reconfiguration of self-rule as a rule over the individual self was not just a moral turn escaping from the political world. The key to understanding Gandhi's political thought, in my reading, is the question of authorization. His turn to self-authorizing individual actor unexpectedly suspended the development-democracy nexus that his predecessors found difficult to break through. The result was an opening up of the anticolonial movement from its own discursive constraints and to the masses who needed to show no proof of their fitness (even as

---

<sup>46</sup> For an interest-based interpretation, see Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); for a history of Gandhi's free-floating reception among the peasants, see Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 288-348; for an account of his "spiritualization" of politics, see Raghavan N. Iyer. *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Gandhi himself remained wary of the mob and eschewed the invocation of the people as a collective actor).

Gandhi's singular diagnostic brilliance resided in his audacious probing of the developmental framework through which the problem of popular authorization was articulated. The Mahatma's far-reaching critique—often incorrectly reduced to the more essentialist problem of civilization—questioned the reliance of the anticolonial democratic project on the discourse of developmentalism. Instead of working within the problem-space of developmentalism, Gandhi embraced rather an impossible project of displacing the collective condition of politics onto the individual moral actor. Toward the end of *Hind Swaraj*, following Gandhi's summary of the duties incumbent on anticolonial actors, the Reader, Gandhi's imagined interlocutor, asked him: "This is a large order. When will *all* carry it out?"<sup>47</sup> Gandhi answered saying that individual actors have nothing to do with others. There is thus no need to wait for a people arrive.<sup>48</sup> Self-rule could only be enacted by taking the self as the source of authorization—by way of ruling the self. This extraordinary rejection of the collective language of popular politics was not unrelated to the anxiety over peoplehood and the attendant deferral of self-rule. Having demonstrated the developmental entanglement of colonial peoplehood, Gandhi displaced the site of action from the collective to the self. In this way, his ethical vision of individual self-rule operated as a pointed answer to the political crisis of popular authorization. Although Gandhi's intervention was no mere ethical flight away from politics, the very nature of his concept of self-rule resisted its consolidation as an institutionalized ideal. His intervention thus interrupted—rather than displaced—the hegemony of the developmental framework in Indian political life.

---

<sup>47</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *'Hind Swaraj' and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117 [emphasis added].

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Around the same time, the time of peoplehood would be scrutinized with more systematic intent by another discerning school of political thought—anticolonial federalism. If Gandhi bypassed the problem of collective peoplehood, the federalists aimed to rethink the criteria of peoplehood from the group up. Announcing a sharp break from the nineteenth century, the Indian federalists perspicaciously questioned the picture of one and undivided peoplehood. The federalists were in dialogue with British pluralist and American progressive thought. But the distinctive dimension of their project lay in the claim that the political ideal of representative government was rooted in the paradigmatic discourse of “unilinear” development. The intellectual source of the federalist school was the Bengali philosopher Brajendranath Seal (1864-1938)—a close and critical reader of Hegel; it was pushed forward by Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968), Bipin Chandra Pal, and C.R. Das (1870-1925). Their (anti-) Hegelian origins made the pluralists keenly aware of the discourse of development that underwrote the expansionist view of representative government: the idea that centralized representative government was the end toward which the rest of the world is traveling could only be a meaningful proposition if world history was thought of as a linear progression. They instead suggested that the trajectory of development intrinsic to the “eastern” people had been blocked by the colonial intrusion. Armed with this argument, the federalists drew inspirations from the burgeoning literature on the Indian village republic to articulate a project of diffused self-rule. They proposed that the people should be conceptualized as many-willed and dispersed. The federalists also resisted the conception of the people as an entity unified by a determinate boundary—or as a territorial object that could be divided into the majority and the minority.

The pluralist re-conceptualization of peoplehood allowed the federalists to overcome the nineteenth-century order of sovereignty and government. Insofar as the people is many-willed

and the time of development is multilinear, the criteria of popular fitness and unity cease to matter. On this view, plural sovereignty and self-government on a small scale are one and the same. Yet, for all their scrupulously formulated normative objections against monist sovereignty, the monist figure of the people—perhaps the most captivating modern incarnation of monist sovereignty—was hard to give up on. The problem manifested in the attempts to re-articulate federalism as a discourse of resistance against colonial subjection. If the people are many-willed and scattered, where could a collective authorization against colonialism be found? This tension led the federalist leaders, especially C.R. Das, to supplement pluralist sovereignty with the provisional figure of a “one” people coming together to end colonial rule. The federalist attempts to combine a pluralist theory of peoplehood with the “resistance” discourse of popular sovereignty ended in a theoretical stalemate.<sup>49</sup> This dilemma, however, revealed much about the Janus-faced nature of popular sovereignty. The federalists’ rejection of the one people as a constituted entity stood in uneasy tension with their reliance on the constituent power of the people—a dilemma that undercut their capacity to compete with the emerging alternative of centralized statehood.

The search for a popular de-authorization of the empire intensified with the arrival of Jawaharlal Nehru on the scene in the 1920s. Nehru was critical of the moral texture of Gandhian swaraj as well as the federalist affirmation of divided sovereignty. Instead, he made an emphatic return to the unilinear developmental premise of the pre-Gandhian era. Crucially, however, Nehru refused to take development to be a slow process of societal and cultural change. The time

---

<sup>49</sup> On the formation of popular sovereignty as a discourse of resistance, see Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989); Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003, 43-140; Margaret Canovan, *The People* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 10-39.

of development instead appeared to be a malleable process if guided rightly by a state free of imperial constraints. Indeed, Nehru's founding promise amounted to a hope for asserting sovereign control over the time of development. This, then, was Nehru's fundamental break from the pre-Gandhian understanding of development. Nehru questioned the idea that anticolonial sovereignty means the control of the colonial government; the point rather was to rethink the meaning of sovereignty itself. He re-signified the question of sovereign statehood as that which could rise above the slow pace of history. Postcolonial founding could be articulated as an immediately attainable ideal precisely because of the claim that the sovereign state would make possible an accelerated route to democracy proper.

The larger interpretative problem that plagues the study of anticolonial thought—what we might think of as a problem of the belated universal—is particularly strong in the case of Nehru and his generation. The assumption that the non-European career of democracy is the belated realization of a prior ideal worked out in the Euro-American world tends to fit easily with the evidence of constitutional founding.<sup>50</sup> A closer reading reveals, on the contrary, that postcolonial founding was neither a sudden realization of a preexisting ideal nor the natural outcome of being “schooled” in democracy under colonialism. For Nehru as for many other postcolonial founders, sovereign statehood figured as the vehicle that would propel the people to the advanced stage of development. In the process, independence and democracy ceased to be ideals only available after the consummation of the development of the masses; they instead were transformed into an answer to the very problem of underdevelopment.

---

<sup>50</sup> For two different versions of this argument, see David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

This project of postcolonial founding relied on a reworked picture of colonial peoplehood. Nehru did not refute the premise of the absent people; but turned the argument on its head by grounding the project of anticolonial sovereignty on the claims of a future people. The utopia of a future people—freed of social unfreedom—lived off the present misery of the destitute masses. In the founding narrative, the people of a deferred future figured as the source of sovereignty who authorized the pursuit of “rapid progress” by the planning state. This developmental state would not merely translate or represent popular will; it would work as a mediator to make the people one with itself. Though the people were not simply to be the passive object of development, the primary developmental agency was located in the planning state. The enduring inheritance of anticolonial thought—the priority of government over sovereignty—found a different life in the moment of founding. The people had finally arrived as a trace of the future, to authorize the planning state’s accelerated travel through the time of development.

## V. Comparative Conditions and Global Claims

In 1934, the historian Bimanbehari Majumdar published a volume titled *History of Political Thought from Rammohan to Dayananda (1821-1883)*—perhaps the first significant attempt at writing the history of modern Indian political thought. Majumdar’s now forgotten intellectual history was exceptionally erudite, with a remarkable command over an archive scattered in monographs and periodical articles in multiple Indian regions and languages. This otherwise exemplary act of writing the history of political thought from the non-European world started with a telling apology. The “title of the work,” Majumdar noted, required “some explanation”:

“Political thought in the modern academic sense is a development possible only in a free state working out its destiny, or in a new state in process of formation out of the chaos of

political strifes. In a country like ours, amongst a people who have for ages been ruled over by a succession of foreigners no other political development is normally possible except acquiescence... a development of political thought has taken place, through criticism and appreciation of the British administrative system in all its different and expanding spheres, for that is the only way in which political thought can grow in a subject country, as it grew in the subject medieval countries of Central Europe through discussions of questions affecting the Papal and Empire government...”<sup>51</sup>

Some three decades later, when Majumdar published a new edition of the volume in independent India, the title of the volume had been changed to *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*. This titular modification had to do with the consideration that the term “political ideas” is more “modest” than “political thought.” He reiterated the troubled relationship of the colonized people with the enterprise of political thought as they had to “give expression to their political ideas often in the garb of an essay on society, its functions and reforms needed.”<sup>52</sup>

Majumdar’s agenda in the book, however, was anything but modest. In the preface to the first edition, having felt it necessary to justify the title of the book, Majumdar emphatically argued that the contributions of many nineteenth-century Indian thinkers preceded their British counterparts:

I have shown how even before Austin, Raja Rammohun Roy made a reconciliation between the historical and analytical schools of jurisprudence and distinguished Law from Morality, how Akshaykumar Dutta preached the organismic theory of state before Herbert Spencer...and how Bankimchandra presented a new theory of Nationalism.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Bimanbehari Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas* (Calcutta: Bookland Private Ltd., 1967 [1934]), v.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

In the span of two paragraphs, Majumdar's shift from doubting the very possibility of "political thought" in the colonial world to its historical precedence captures a constitutive anxiety of writing the history of modern non-European political thought. Majumdar's apprehension was shared by the majority of political thinkers he so carefully studied in the volume. This anxiety over the comparative location of Indian political thought is more than simply a testament to the necessarily comparative dimension of any political thought.<sup>54</sup> As Majumdar's *History* reveals, modern political thought since the nineteenth century has been comparative in one specific sense: the developmental interpretation of difference. The assumption that the agenda of "modern" non-European thought is a delayed restaging of earlier European ideas relies on a developmental approach to global difference. Here, in this assumption, Majumdar would have been joined by a host of great nineteenth-century European thinkers, ranging from John Stuart Mill to Karl Marx. This is a challenge that both European and non-European political thinkers had to grapple with, though for the latter the comparative weight of colonial political life generated a strong sense of doubt concerning the possibility of transcending their own historical particularity—and living up to what Leigh Jenco has characterized as the "deterritorialized claims" of political theory.<sup>55</sup>

The desire to overcome the comparative undermining of the theoretical worth of Indian political thought often manifested in the claims of historical precedence. It was indeed a common trope for Indian political thinkers to stress that the resources of their tradition predate the

---

<sup>54</sup> On the comparative dimension of works that are not usually categorized as "comparative political theory," see Andrew March, "What is Comparative Political Theory?," *Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 531-565.

<sup>55</sup> Leigh Jenco, "Introduction: On the Possibility of Chinese Thought as Global Theory," in *Chinese Thought as Global Theory Diversifying Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences and Humanities*, ed. Leigh Jenco (New York: State University of New York Press, 2017), 11.

European episodes.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the question of global connection—and its implication—for the conceptual content of anticolonial political thought far transcends the problem of “before” and “after.” There is no better exemplar of this problem than the Indian career of John Stuart Mill—a lifelong employee of the East India Company and the nineteenth century’s premier theorist of colonialism. The younger Mill had been part of Indian curriculum since the 1840s and enjoyed the status of the principal British political philosopher in India in his own lifetime. His name was to be found in abundance in Indian political writings and rhetoric since the mid-nineteenth century. A thinker so widely read and discussed, and whose account of the colonial exception was unmissable, somehow turned out to be a resource for demanding Indian self-government in nineteenth-century India. To give one example: In 1907, the firebrand anticolonial thinker, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, took the British Secretary of State for India, John Morley, to task for wrongfully appropriating J.S. Mill. Writing in response to Morley’s invocation of Mill during a speech in the British parliament, Tilak argued that the criterion of the Millian exception for foreign rule had been long defunct in India and the words of the philosopher were in direct support of the Indian cause.<sup>57</sup> A number of Indian thinkers, especially R.C. Dutt, selectively appropriated Mill’s celebration of self-government with all its normative bite to question the British deferral of Indian participation in the government. This reading of Mill was so entrenched that three decades later Ambedkar could attack the Congress’ program for self-government for

---

<sup>56</sup> This issue was not unique to India. For an account of nineteenth-century Chinese grappling with the problem, see Leigh Jenco “Histories of Thought and Comparative Political Theory: The Curious Case of “Chinese Origins of Western Knowledge,” 1860-1895,” *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (2014): 658-681.

<sup>57</sup> Bal Gangadhar Tilak, “Mill and Morley,” in *Samagra Lokamanya Tilak*, vol. 2 (Pune: Kesari Prakasana, 1974), 910-914 [Marathi]. I thank Andrew Halladay for his help with translating the essay from Marathi.

its uncritical repetition of a Millian “dogma”: “Every Congressman who repeats the dogma of Mill that one country is not fit to rule another country, must admit that one class is not fit to rule another class.”<sup>58</sup>

And yet such powerful appropriations of Mill did not enable either R.C. Dutt or Tilak to overcome the deferred time of anticolonial sovereignty. Mill could be read against the grain of his text, but the deeper framework of developmental comparison represented by Mill proved far more recalcitrant. Gandhi’s pithy characterization of the anticolonial project as “English rule without the Englishman” powerfully captured this problem-space of anticolonial political thought. Indeed, the real challenge of anticolonial political thought consisted in examining the theoretical contours of the ideal of “English rule.” As thinkers such as Gandhi and Seal questioned the narrative of historical development, the norms of representation and centralized sovereignty unraveled. Almost all twentieth-century anticolonial thinkers I study in the dissertation grappled relentlessly with the normative entailment of their purported developmental belatedness. Gandhi attempted to step outside of developmental reasoning by questioning the collectivist understanding of rule, while the federalists projected a pluralist future liberated from the constraints of centralized statehood. Others like Nehru searched for an accelerated journey toward a world freed of developmental unevenness.

The intellectual “constriction” of the rest of the world was ultimately developmental in essence. By and large, Indian anticolonial thinkers agreed that attempts to overcome developmentalism were never simply a matter of counterposing the precolonial against the colonial. They realized that developmental norms themselves had to be immanently engaged with. The critical tradition in the history of Indian political thought never failed to point out that

---

<sup>58</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, ed. S. Anand (New Delhi: Navanaya, 2014), 218.

it was only by challenging the framework of developmental comparison that the colonies could have a democracy liberated from the burden of a future beyond the pale of politics and a “political thought” whose comparative weight could transmogrify it into a singular perspective on our global condition. The animating concern of this dissertation is to recuperate this distinct contribution of anticolonial democratic thought to the modern history of political thought.

## VI. Anticolonial Visions and the Postcolonial Life of Democracy

This history of the problem of peoplehood in anticolonial political thought ultimately hopes to illuminate the intellectual genealogy of the form of postcolonial democracy we now see in South Asia and beyond. The postcolonial states that were born in the ruins of empire across Asia and Africa have predominantly understood themselves in developmentalist terms. As Arturo Escobar puts it, postcolonial “reality” itself has been “colonized” by the “development discourse,” cutting across economic planning to techniques of governance.<sup>59</sup> This developmental character of postcolonial democracy has spawned a whole body of scholarship. Historians, political economists, and anthropologists have extensively studied the developmental discourses and practices of postcolonial political life over the last few decades.<sup>60</sup> The adoption of developmental

---

<sup>59</sup> Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of Theory of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>60</sup> See, in particular, Sudipta Kaviraj, “Democracy and Development in India,” in *Democracy and Development*, ed. Amiya Kumar Bagchi (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 92–130; Pranab K. Bardhan, *The Political Economy of Development in India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); Sundhya Pahuja, “From Decolonization to Developmental Nation State,” in *Decolonizing International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 44–94; Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2003); Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

language by international organizations and the technocratic nature of postcolonial planning regimes, however, have obscured the earlier roots of developmentalism in the colonial career of popular sovereignty. Seen in the light of its longer history, developmentalism turns out to be neither merely a product of the post-War reordering of the world nor simply an institutional inheritance of colonial governance. It is more fundamental: the political grounding of developmentalism on the figure of the people rendered it central to the very imagination of democracy in the colonial and postcolonial world.

The democracy-development nexus has only become tighter in the era of postcolonial democracy. Much of this has to do with the democratization of a developmental form of claim-making and authorization in the postcolonial period. The imperially inflected logic of temporally prioritizing development over democracy faced intense practical challenge in the postcolonial era. With the institution of universal franchise and electoral democracy, the masses—hitherto the marker of a deferred sovereignty—came to participate in the messy terrain of representative democracy at an unprecedented scale. In postcolonial India, for example, the dispersed practices of electoral democracy came to take precedence over the utopian project of social transformation led by a planning state standing beyond the ordinary preoccupations of “political democracy.”<sup>61</sup> The name of the people continued to be routinely invoked to authorize the mandate for various forms of developmental project, while the postcolonial people themselves question the authority and legitimacy of instituted power on developmental grounds.<sup>62</sup> The postcolonial politics of

---

<sup>61</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “Government and the People,” in *Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches*, vol. 3, March 1953–August 1957 (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958), 138–9.

<sup>62</sup> See Sudipta Kaviraj, “A State of Contradictions: The Post-colonial State in India,” in *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 210–233; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 210–19.

development—whether involving economic or socio-cultural issues—is hardly reducible to the familiar framework of redistributive politics or even to the framework of justice *stricto sensu*. This specific language of postcolonial democracy, in my telling, emanates from the (anti-) colonial conception of the people as a developmental entity. The sovereign place of the people is rarely questioned in postcolonial democracy; but the primary way the people appears is not so much the idealized source of will to be translated into laws. The people rather figures as the actor who authorizes or denies the terms of its own development. This deeply developmental character of postcolonial democracy cannot thus be explained away as an effect of modern governmentality or as a byproduct of the problem of poverty.

The postcolonial revolution severed the immediate imperial politics of deferred peoplehood, but the conceptual inheritance proved to be stubborn. In its postcolonial iteration, development has not just been a medium through which democracy speaks but also the language that shapes the meaning of democracy. The dissertation thus suggests that the global career of modern democracy—which is more or less equivalent to postcolonial democracy—cannot be understood through the framework of the belated universal implicit in the commonplace uses of descriptive devices such as “democratization” or “developing world.” Postcolonial democracy was born out of a struggle against the hierarchically integrated vision of the world and its attendant developmental resolution of difference. In the end, the promises of development turned out to be less of a guiding star beyond the messiness of popular politics, becoming rather the stuff of politics itself. What, however, remains a guiding star is the wager of the critical tradition of anticolonial political thought for a democracy not dominated by the demands of developmental temporality.

## VII. Chapter Outline

In the following chapters, I trace the Indian search for sovereign peoplehood in the period between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The Indian side of the narrative begins with the first theorizations of self-government in the nineteenth century and the endpoint is the emergence of independent states in South Asian in the late 1940s. While the historical arc of colonialism to independence guides this study, I do not take the conventional narratives of “origin” and “goal” for granted. The exploration of the problem takes me back and forth between Britain and India, even as the narrative is often intersected by detours through other sites. The chapters are organized chronologically, though each chapter focuses on specific theoretical problems related to the larger theme of popular sovereignty.

The first two chapters closely study the formation of the global scope of popular sovereignty in the nineteenth century. In chapter 1, I present a new interpretation of the developmental turn in nineteenth-century political thought. The contraction of global distance in the nineteenth century brought the question of colonial difference to the forefront. Reading G.W.F. Hegel and J.S. Mill together in the imperial context of the nineteenth century, I argue that the turn to the framework of historical development replaced and departed from human-centric or purely societal accounts to colonial difference. The philosophical roots of the developmental turn lay in the attempts to think of the globe as a unified category. I suggest that Hegel’s theorization of development as global, connected, and contradiction-driven captured this new philosophical shift in nineteenth-century political thought. The chapter then shows how the normative implications of the developmental turn were sketched out by British political thinkers, especially John Stuart Mill. As British thinkers tried to reconcile emerging domestic democracy with foreign despotism, the question of peoplehood came to be central to their normative

maneuver. The disqualification of Indian sovereignty on the premise of its absent peoplehood allowed for shoring up the normative validity of representative democracy while legitimating despotic rule abroad. In the process, the political map of the nineteenth century transformed into a global hierarchy of peoplehood.

The second chapter looks at the formation of hierarchical peoplehood from the vantage point of nineteenth-century Indian political thought. The chapter questions the existing periodization of Indian liberalism, where the first half of the nineteenth century is often prioritized over the latter half. Offering a new reading of the political thought of Rammohan Roy, I show that the early nineteenth-century “liberalism” in India was primarily marked by the enlightenment framework of universal reason. In contrast, the liberal framework centered on the ideal of representative government took shape in the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. Disentangling development from civilizational essentialism, a group of Indian political thinkers—Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, and Surendranath Banerjea—creative appropriated J.S. Mill and Macaulay to articulate the Indian claim to self-government. Their critique of colonial rule has led a number of recent interpreters to characterize Indian liberalism as a corrective to metropolitan liberalism. Complicating these interpretations, I recover the ways in which the problem of peoplehood entangled colonial liberalism. Despite creatively turning development against colonial government, the Indian liberals stumbled on the foundational hierarchy of peoplehood that underpinned the global circulation of metropolitan liberalism. The result was a politics of appealing to the British people for advancing the Indian people. This was precisely the political predicament that would bring an end to Indian liberalism at the turn of the twentieth century.

The fragile politics of hierarchical peoplehood would spectacularly unravel in the first decade of the twentieth century. The third chapter theorizes the colonial paradox of peoplehood that Indian anticolonial thinkers grappled with in their attempts to conceptualize self-rule, or swaraj. The concept of swaraj came into being with the rejection of deferred colonial self-government. The persistence of the developmentalist figuration of the people brought the swaraj theorists in confrontation with the not-yet claimable figure of the people at the very moment of disavowing the British claim to rule. The chapter traces how the figuration of the people as the bearer of historical backwardness inflected it as a political abstraction, rendering the people as an unclaimable entity. Revisiting this underappreciated pre-Gandhian history of the concept of swaraj and reinterpreting its Gandhian moment, this chapter offers a new reading of Gandhi's theory of moral self-rule. Gandhi's surprising political purchase, I suggest, pertained to his rejection of the developmental framework as well as the very condition of popular authorization. In so doing, the chapter theorizes the political dimension of Gandhi's otherwise moral theory of action and recovers the conceptual innovation that turned the eccentric Mahatma into one of the most influential anticolonial thinkers of the twentieth century.

With the democratization of the anticolonial movement, the terms of peoplehood and sovereignty went through a dramatic reconsideration. Recovering a largely forgotten body of pluralist political thought from early twentieth-century India, the fourth chapter explores how the question of popular sovereignty shaped the federalist reconfiguration of anticolonial democracy. Through a sustained engagement with British pluralist and American progressive thought, Indian federalist thinkers eventually developed a many-willed conception of the people to overcome the rejection of Indian peoplehood on the ground of its lack of nationhood and historical backwardness. However, the alternative source of sovereignty the federalists pointed to—plural

and many-willed— stood in tension with their simultaneous pursuit of a people speaking in one voice. In this way, the constitutive tension of the pluralist conception of sovereignty came strikingly alive in the colonial world. The federalist experimentation also instantiates the limits of normatively grounding anticolonial politics in the framework of what is variously referred to as multiple modernity or temporality (though Indian federalism was no simple paean for another time of politics: the project of many-willed peoplehood was complemented by concrete institutional accounts). The striving to divide the time of political modernity into a “multilinear” scheme, however, came to be undone as the federalists remained split between a pluralist theory of small republics and a monist theory of popular resistance.

The fifth chapter takes a fresh look at the postcolonial founding. This much-misunderstood episode of anticolonial thought is generally taken to be the moment when democracy went global. Born out of an identification of the people with the nation, postcolonial founding, as the familiar narrative goes, was the belated realization of a set of ideals forged elsewhere. Central to this narrative has been the so-called international origin theory of anticolonial nationalism. While the international legitimation of national self-determination was not unimportant, rights discourse was profoundly inadequate in answering the problem of peoplehood that hitherto disqualified the colonial claim for democracy. This chapter is organized around Jawaharlal Nehru—simultaneously an active member of the international community of anticolonial actors and Gandhi’s successor within the Indian National Congress. Intellectually a world apart from his mentor (Gandhi), Nehru drew on the emerging idea of the planning state to connect the demand for sovereignty with an aspiration for accelerated development. The chapter reconstructs how Nehru maps the parallel between futures of scarce and abundance onto the distinction between destitute masses and the people of the future. This allowed Nehru to attribute

the agency for resistance to the not-yet people, while drawing the authorization of the centralized planning state from the claim of a developed future. This vision of postcolonial founding legitimated the project of “catching up” with the “developed” world, as Nehru and his colleagues reinforced the assumption that colonial underdevelopment stands in contradiction with the demand of modern democracy. Nehru’s project of postcolonial sovereignty ultimately turned out to be a hope for sovereignty over the time of development itself.

The folding of the existing people into a program for accelerated future required a suspension of the boundary problem, especially the group conflicts around the questions of caste and religion. The Dalit thinker, B.R. Ambedkar, mounted a formidable critique of the project for postcolonial sovereignty as a continuation of the rule of the majority. Ambedkar pointedly articulated the tension between the two faces of the people. The single-minded striving for the abundant future, he argued, would only reproduce the caste hierarchy that disintegrates the people into a graded order. The chapter concludes by suggesting that Ambedkar’s prescient diagnosis of the unraveling of the Nehruvian project into an internecine struggle over the boundary of peoplehood articulated the signs of the future to come.

The epilogue of the dissertation takes stock of the unforeseen ways in which the postcolonial people has come to shape the meaning of democracy as well as the legacy of developmentalism. Reconsidering the historical and normative studies of developmentalism and democracy, I suggest that the prevalent tendency to conceptually externalize development from democracy elides the deep entanglement between the two. The lack of appreciation of the historical co-constitution of democracy and development means that scholars have either given in to a narrow democratic defense of development or to a displacement of the question of democracy itself onto the dispute over development. The developmental prioritization of the

authorization from the future over the authorization of the existing people remains an enduring problem. As this history of popular sovereignty in colonial India shows, the philosophical insight and political creativity of anticolonial political thinkers consisted in their questioning of the developmental terms and conditions of popular sovereignty in a world brought together by the cataclysmic experience of colonialism. It is this spirited grappling of anticolonial Indian political thinkers with the foundational problems of modern democratic thought that the following chapters closely study.

## Chapter 1

# **A Hierarchy of Peoples: Colonialism and the Rise of Developmentalism in the Nineteenth Century**

### **Introduction**

During his first encounter with a group of Portuguese Jesuits in 1573, the Mughal emperor Akbar keenly questioned the missionaries about the “wonders of Portugal and manners and customs of Europe.” Reflecting on this encounter, Abul Fazl, the Mughal vizier, noted in his biography of Akbar that the emperor “desired to make this inquiry [about Europe] as a means for taming this barbarian group.”<sup>1</sup> While this reversal of a familiar Eurocentric hierarchy of civilizations might potentially be surprising to modern readers, this scenario was by no means improbable. The Mughals, after all, considered themselves to be one of the greatest empires of the known world.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the European traders based in India slowly became integrated into the commercial life of coastal Indian cities. While the British traders began to found their own enclaves with the permission of native rulers, they “played virtually no political role outside their enclaves” until the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Though Europeans were subject of ethnographic curiosity, theological exchanges, and trade-related

---

<sup>1</sup> Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019 [1590-1602]), 81.

<sup>2</sup> A few years later, Akbar would officially invite the Jesuits to the Mughal court to discuss Christian theology. The story of his first encounter thus should not be taken to imply a dogmatic Mughal sense of superiority. On the Mughal-Jesuits exchange, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam “Mediterranean Exemplars: Jesuits Political Lessons for a Mughal Emperor,” in *Machiavelli, Islam, and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, eds. Lucio Biasori and Giuseppe Marocci, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 105-130.

<sup>3</sup> P.J. Marshall, “The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century,” in *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947*, ed. C.A. Bayly (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1990), 19.

tensions, no overpowering idea of Europe yet permeated the Indian political and intellectual world.<sup>4</sup> It is only with the British conquest of Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century—which began as a relatively local political victory—that Indian political and intellectual horizons became fatefully interlocked with the history of Europe.<sup>5</sup> Still, eighteenth-century Indian responses to the arrival of British rule held on, if hesitantly, to the pre-colonial idioms of politics.<sup>6</sup>

The reckoning with the colonial encounter in European political thought began much earlier. The colonization of the Americas—marked by the cataclysmic effect of discovering a new world and the brutal subjection of the native inhabitants of the Americas—posed an altogether novel set of questions for early modern European political thought. The process of making the unfamiliar familiar—what the historian Anthony Pagden terms the “principle of attachment”—went through multiple phases over the long history of European colonization.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of the early Spanish colonization of the Americas in the sixteenth century, Francisco de Vitoria—to consider one famous example—attempted to examine the otherness of Amerindians through the preexisting Thomist natural law framework. To render the Amerindians commensurable with Europeans, Vitoria employed the categories of liminality internal to the

---

<sup>4</sup> See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India: Words, People, Empires, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 286-325.

<sup>5</sup> On the minor beginning of British rule and its eventual signification as historical inevitability, see Ranajit Guha, “A Conquest Foretold,” in *The Small Voice History: Collected Essays* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 373-390.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207-249.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 17-49; see also Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Christian natural law tradition: sinners, unbelievers, madmen and so on. By arguing that Amerindians do not fall under such categories, Vitoria sought to disqualify justifications of violent colonization and assimilate Amerindians under a natural law vision of humanity.<sup>8</sup> As the age of enlightenment emerged and natural law traditions declined, the conjectural history of humanity would introduce a new approach to the colonies. The construction of the colonized as closer to the natural could allow for both their glorification as noble and condemnation as ignoble—depending on how the distinction between the natural and the social was normatively evaluated.<sup>9</sup> It even made possible signification of Europeans as a corrupted version of the pristine nature of an original humankind. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, a significant number of enlightenment thinkers would mount severe criticisms of European domination over the non-European, often by stressing the shared ground of “cultural humanity.”<sup>10</sup> To be sure, even as the enlightenment critique of empire was flourishing in late eighteenth-century European thought, the “second” imperial expansion of Europe was acquiring new momentum in Asia and Africa.<sup>11</sup>

All of this was to change in the nineteenth century—in the metropolis and in the colonies alike. The overarching framework that came to mark the problem of colonial difference in the

---

<sup>8</sup> See Francisco de Vitoria, “On the American Indians,” in *Political Writings*, eds. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 233-292. For an account of the limits of Vitoria’s natural law approach (and how the colonial encounter created the international dimension of natural law), see Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13-31.

<sup>9</sup> See Ronald Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 1-4, 68-176; For an account of the limits of approaching non-Europeans as “natural humanity,” see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 11-71.

<sup>10</sup> Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 1-71, 259-283.

<sup>11</sup> See C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1930* (London: Longman, 1989).

nineteenth century is that of historical development—what I will simply call developmentalism.<sup>12</sup> Displacing the conjectural narrative of humanity as well as naturalist teleology of progress, the developmental paradigm foregrounded the location of a people in a progressive order of history. To put it simply, the distinctive marker of developmentalism is the assumption that different points of a shared time could be located in different sites of the world. The canonical political thinkers of the nineteenth century largely participated in the developmentalist discourse, albeit with different theoretical orientations and aims. The first great theorist of the developmental turn was G.W.F. Hegel, which was then furthered by a host of British, French, and German thinkers in the course of the nineteenth century. The hierarchical integration of Europe and the colonies in a shared global framework distinctly enabled a developmental resolution of colonial difference. The colonies were no longer either merely other or immediately identifiable with Europe. They would become interpreted as a “living museum of the European past.”<sup>13</sup> Critically building on the burgeoning literature on development and progress in modern political thought, this chapter proposes that the hallmark of nineteenth-century developmentalism was a fundamentally global conception of development. The

---

<sup>12</sup> For studies on the rise of development and progress from the perspective of the history of political thought, see Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); for an examination of the problem around the questions of modernity and colonialism, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); for a study of developmentalism from the perspective of post-Kantian critical theory, see Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 78; see also Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 3-23.

developmental shift was constitutive of the labor of rendering the world thinkable as *historically* one—spatially as well as temporally.

The theoretical breaks of developmentalism from eighteenth-century approaches to global difference are best captured in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. Hegel framed the problem of global difference as historically chronological experiences which could only be understood in terms of their comparative global location. For all their differences from Hegel, the British liberal imperialists thinkers I consider in the latter half of the chapter—most notably, John Stuart Mill—shared these new conditions of developmental comparison across societies. Both Hegel and Mill agreed that the key to locating a people is not the category of humanity or that of nature; the developmental process instead unfolds historically where the relative quality of norms decisively determines the range of possible actions available to a people. They both maintained that the source of progressive development is not embedded in all peoples equally; progress is mobile and dependent on a given tradition's moral and material capacity to seize on to it. The global character of development thus required a global resolution, i.e., the historical development of the backward peoples by the advanced ones. Therein lies the main difference between the global conception of development theorized by Hegel and Mill from the societal and naturalist conceptions of development outlined by their eighteenth-century predecessors. The broad features of this developmental framework would permeate European and Indian political thought by the second half of the nineteenth century.

In articulating the developmental shift in nineteenth-century political thought, the chapter posits the figure of the people at the heart of a renewed understanding and justification of colonial rule. While Hegel (and the elder Mill) understood colonialism to be a mandate from history, it was left for the next generation of liberal imperialists to theoretically reconcile the

norm of democratic self-government at home with the conflicting principle of imperial rule abroad. Though the Indian people already featured as the repository of historical backwardness in James Mill's *History of British India*, he also held that the real sources of backwardness are "bad laws" and "bad governments."<sup>14</sup> In the hands of T.B. Macaulay and John Stuart Mill, the hierarchy of civilizations simultaneously began to be signified as a hierarchy of peoples. The younger Mill, in particular, singled out certain qualities of peoplehood as the ultimate political markers of historical development. As the bearer of historical development, the people emerged as the ground that would determine if the colonies were prepared for self-government. The result was a "democratic" justification of colonialism. The colonies were constructed as an entity lacking the very ground of democratic rule: sovereign peoplehood. Colonial masses, it was claimed, lack the necessary political "fitness" to be a people. The aim of colonial rule then was precisely to accomplish this task.

The chapter proceeds in two steps. The first section explores the place of the colonies in nineteenth-century political thought through a close reading of G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy of world history. Hegel's turn to world history was shaped as much by his critique of eighteenth-century European reflections on the non-European world as by his affinity with contemporaneous progressivist texts such as James Mill's *History of British India* (1817) and Carl Ritter's *Erkunde* (1817-18). The historicist character of Hegelian thought is well known and has been a critical foil for postcolonial studies' reckoning with the narrative of progress in political modernity. While I stress the irreducibly developmental character of Hegel's philosophy of history against recent attempts to critically salvage it (most notably by Susan Buck-Morss), the larger aim of the section is to theoretically articulate the philosophical shifts that facilitated

---

<sup>14</sup> James Mill, *History of British India*, vol. 5 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826), 541-2.

the rise of developmentalism. Bringing together the spatial and temporal dimensions of Hegel's philosophy of history, I argue that the underlying picture of the world as hierarchical, relational, and ultimately unified was an indispensable condition of developmental comparison. Hegel's attempt to geographically inscribe the uneven points of historical time on the map of the world would be crucial to ascribing philosophical coherence and reason to the movement of world history. Reading the *Lectures* together with *Philosophy of Right*, I then show how the developmental approach resulted in a new justification of colonial rule in the nineteenth century.

Building on this interpretation of the developmentalist turn, the chapter then moves on to liberal imperialist thought in the global context of the British Empire. Having briefly addressed the eighteenth-century ideas of imperial rule, the section traces how the developmental unification of the world resulted in a hierarchy of peoples. The global scope of development shaped the nineteenth-century British liberal approach to the colonial question. The elder Mill repudiated the dominant post-Burkean approach to Indian difference and put forward a linear conception of historical progress. While James Mill's utilitarian resolution of civilizational backwardness had limited purchase, his developmental approach would be continued by his son as well as by his foremost critic, T.B. Macaulay. The younger Mill's emphasis on the necessity to find correspondence between the level of historical development and the form of political institutions would simultaneously project self-government as the highest ideal and defer it to a distant future. In particular, Mill's recasting of the problem of development in terms of the qualities of peoplehood had important descriptive and normative consequences. Descriptively, the figure of the people emerged as a repository of civilizational backwardness, while the account of inadequate colonial peoplehood normatively justified imperial rule on "democratic" terms. Taking stock of the scholarship on Mill's thoughts on national character and cultural

difference, I contend that his occasional sensitivity toward those issues does not dislodge the more fundamental presence of a global hierarchy of peoplehood.

### **One World, One Time: The Place of the Colonies in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought**

As decades of scholarship on empire and political theory has established, the colonies were not an external concern in the formation of modern political thought. The question of the colonies was inseparable from how modern European political thought located itself in the world. The place of the colonies in modern political thought was not, however, a fixed one. As I noted in the Introduction, the question of the colonies shaped and was shaped by different theoretical frameworks over the modern period— from the discourse of natural law in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the developmentalist framework of the nineteenth century. In this section, through a reading of Hegel’s philosophy of world history, I explore the re-signification of the colonies in nineteenth-century political thought. Unlike the Mills, Macaulay or Tocqueville, Hegel had no official involvement with the colonial world. But he did, as we shall see, articulate what came to be the most dominant justification of colonial rule in the nineteenth century. Hegel sought to offer a new framework to theorize the differences across societies—to establish that such differences are a rational expression of a higher order of *global*—and thus universal—truth. Hegel was not alone in this endeavor. The attempt to reconsider and re-situate the place of the colonies in the wake of the new era of historicism was widespread in Europe, cutting across disciplines and intellectual traditions. In spite of the peculiarity of his metaphysics of spirit, Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, which he delivered over the 1820s, would set the terms for addressing the place of the colonies in nineteenth-century political thought.

“World history,” says Hegel, is a “manifestation of [the] *one* original reason,” for “the history of the world is a rational process, the rational and the necessary evolution of the world spirit.”<sup>15</sup> The history of the world is thus an “image” of reason itself. The oneness of Hegelian reason—as the readers of *Phenomenology of Spirit* would know—emerges only after a journey in time and is marked by radically different stages of being.<sup>16</sup> The oneness of reason is retrospective, since the knowing subject can only comprehend it after the journey. The same is also true for Hegel’s approach to world history. The unity of world history is not given, since the unfolding of the universal happens in non-identical moments and is rendered unified only in the final instance. The question that governs Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* is this: what is the relationship between the universal and world history? Put differently, why should the universal (which, for Hegel, was freedom actualized in the state) be dependent on the particularity of world history? One could, for example, take a universal truth (say, natural law) and judge all societies of the world by that standard. Hegel opposes such an ahistorical conception of universalism, for the universal emerges in history and does not stand outside of it.

Europe’s claim to the universal is thus not based on any philosophical discovery—it was instead a result of Europe’s historical becoming. In other words, the universal unfolds through world history. The history of the world, Hegel concedes, is marked by “all kinds of human

---

<sup>15</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 28-29.

All references to Hegel’s *Lectures*, unless otherwise specified, are to this Cambridge edition.

<sup>16</sup> There is interpretative dispute concerning whether the movement of spirit in Hegel is necessarily historical. For an interpretation that foregrounds the historical nature of spirit, see Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 92-118. For a contesting reading that distinguishes between historical and ahistorical modes of developmental procedures in Hegel, see John McDowell, “Why Does it Matter to Hegel that Geist Has a History,” in *Hegel on Philosophy in History*, eds. Rachel Zuckert and James Kreines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 15-32.

arbitrariness and external necessity.” The task of the philosophy of world history thus is to elevate itself to the “conceptual world” and to cognize the higher unity present in the midst of seemingly boundless events.<sup>17</sup> This does not, however, mean that the universal is omnipresent: only those who have journeyed through the stage of world history where freedom has realized itself could access it. Equally important to keep in mind is the point that while only certain peoples had reached the universal, the entire world participates in the process. A people’s location in the scheme of world history thus directly follows from their proximity to or distance from actualized freedom.

The question of world history first appeared in Hegel’s work toward the end of *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel divides the question of freedom into two parts: subjective spirit (property, contract etc.) and objective spirit (family, civil society, the state etc.). While the individual immediately experiences freedom (or its lack thereof) in the subjective state of abstract rights, the possibility of “substantive” freedom is inextricably related to the social and historical realm of ethical life. It is only by being a member of the state that the individual could reconcile their particular will with the universal.<sup>18</sup> Yet Hegel’s account of freedom, at a deeper level, is not simply collective. It relies on a theory of historical development to ground the possibility of collective freedom in the state. His turn to world history emerges out of the attempt to locate the “independence of the state” (which he calls the “ethical whole”) in the larger, extra-national, context. World history is not just an outgrowth of the journey of the spirit from abstract individual to the state. The “world’s court of judgment” has the highest right of all. The purpose

---

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Lectures*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> G.W.F Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 276.

of this court though is not arbitrating among different nations; its aim rather is to actualize the end of world history through particular nations.<sup>19</sup>

From the outset, Hegel is deeply aware of the immediate sense of difference that the history of the world summons. He concedes that the act of writing history, no matter how small the scale is, struggles to reconcile and transcend the plurality of perspectives. World history, more fundamentally, reflects on disparate nations and peoples, which often lack any obvious historical connection. While addressing the question of difference, Hegel explicitly distinguishes his account from eighteenth-century conjectural histories of humanity. The temptation to take “human nature” as the “common factor” amounts to a failure to appreciate the meaning of “difference.”<sup>20</sup> For Hegel, such an approach to understanding difference across societies is driven by the desire to find “comfort” and “reassurance” by way of abstracting human activity from its contents. As he puts it: “such sovereign disregard of the objective situation is particularly common among French and English writers...[who] fail to distinguish between impulses and inclinations which operate in a restricted sphere and those which are active in the conflicts of interests of world history.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, for Hegel, while the range of human passions might be unchanging, the meaning of human activity is ultimately dependent on “objective history.” But what is the meaning of “objective history”? The first answer that Hegel passingly attempts appears to be not so “objective.” He wonders how present-day Europeans would feel if the “barbarians” had defeated Alexander. If human passions were all the same, then why would “we” feel disturbed by a counterfactual course of historical events? For Hegel, the answer lies in “our” commitment to the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 371, 376.

<sup>20</sup> Hegel, *Lectures*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

objective situation—to be able to see meaning beyond the play of human emotions (which were present in both Alexander and the “barbarians”). The mere historian’s answer to the question of “objective interest” is fundamentally inadequate, for those who purely document events fail to rise beyond empirical details and get bogged down by national and cultural particularities. Hence the necessity to turn to teleology, to “consider world history in relation to its ultimate end.”<sup>22</sup> For world history (where the spirit acquires its most concrete form), it is the idea of substantive—and objective—freedom that constitutes the telos of human activity. This is why Hegel finds the Rousseauian idea of perfectibility to be indeterminate and vague. Having located the drive toward progress in human agency, the idea of perfectibility leaves us with neither a sense of direction nor a criterion to evaluate whether progress is in keeping with the universal. By the same token, Hegel also departs from the other great eighteenth-century French thinker of progress, Condorcet. Condorcet’s stagist account of progress was anthropocentric—an assumption that Hegel wanted to dispense with.<sup>23</sup> Understood naturally, change is a “cyclical” process that does not help us articulate the distinctive nature of progress.<sup>24</sup> Hegel thus also questions Kant’s naturalist teleology of history.<sup>25</sup> The historical change that is worthy of being

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>23</sup> This departure of Hegel from Condorcet has also been pointed out by Ranajit Guha. See Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 28.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted though that Hegel also characterizes the spirit’s “returning upon itself” as a “cyclical” movement—the spirit’s discovery of itself: “progress, therefore, is not an indeterminate advance ad infinitum, for it has a definite aim—namely that of returning upon itself. Thus, it also involves a kind of cyclic movement as the spirit attempts to discover itself.” Ibid., 149.

<sup>25</sup> For Kant’s account of a naturalist teleology of history, see Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective,” in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, ed. Pauline Kleingeld (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 3-16.

called progress instead belongs to the conceptual content, and to the essentially linear form, of world history.<sup>26</sup>

The grounding of historical change in the ultimate end of freedom guides Hegel's developmentalist resolution of difference. The comparison among different peoples should be conducted with reference to the level of their actualization of freedom. If approached through this lens, it transpires that "the history of the world... represents the *successive* stages in the development of that principle whose substantial content is the consciousness of freedom."<sup>27</sup> If one looks around the (old) world, Hegel notes that they will primarily encounter three main principles—or historical stages. The stadial breakdown of the spirit is simple enough. The first stage—specific to the "oriental world"—relies on a pre-critical "unity of the spirit with nature." Hegel refers to caste in India as a case in point. Owing to an inability to distinguish between the natural and the social, the emergence of social hierarchy in Indian thought was immediately "petrified" into a natural hierarchy. The second stage is when the separation between the spirit and nature is achieved, but only incompletely: the freedom inherent to the spirit is understood as the freedom of some. This was the historical location of the Greek and Roman world. In the Roman world, for example, "the personality of the individual and the service toward the universal stand in opposition."<sup>28</sup> For Hegel, it is, of course, in the Germanic world that the historical progression of spirit came to fruition. Reconciling the subjective and objective spirits, freedom, he argues, acquired its universal form in its Germanic moment.

The spirit moved through the globe in time, traveling from China to Greece before actualizing its destiny in Europe. The source of its universality was thus not to be found in the

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,128.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,129-30 (emphasis added).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 130

specific national history—it rather resides in the *movement* of world history itself. Throughout his lectures, Hegel moves between two contradictory images of historical progress. Invoking his familiar trope of contradictory progress, Hegel argues “development... is not just a harmless and peaceful process of growth like that of organic life, but a hard and obstinate struggle with itself.”<sup>29</sup> Seen from the perspective of any historical moment, the spirit is divided between immediate natural interests and the pursuit of the ultimate end. The development of world history is a product of struggle and thus, he maintained, cannot be expressed properly through organic metaphors. Yet, on more than one occasion, Hegel falls back on the organic metaphor of biological and plant lives to describe historical development. Thus, for example, he likens the oriental stage to childhood, the Greco-Roman era to youth, and the Germanic era to old age. For all his warnings about the misleading nature of organic metaphors, Hegel’s retreat to them illustrates an inherent proclivity in the developmental approach to anthropomorphize and organicize what it otherwise claims to be a historical difference (of note here is J.S. Mill’s characterization of non-European peoples as “nonage” races in *On Liberty*).

For Hegel, the nation is the primary unit of world history, even as he maintains that not all nations are necessarily states.<sup>30</sup> Descriptively speaking, Hegel’s idea of the nation encompasses the cultural particularity of a people: “[its] established national traits, its own mode of eating and drinking, and its own way of living.”<sup>31</sup> Historically, the place of a nation in the scheme of world history ultimately depends on its consciousness of the principle of freedom. The right of a nation to its state can only emerge after it has reached the advanced developmental

---

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 127.

<sup>30</sup> On this point, see Jens Bartelson, *Visions of World Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 167-9.

<sup>31</sup> G.W.F Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox and Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 69.

stage. World history moves through each nation and marks them as a “link in the chain of [its] development”— which is ultimately one. The spirit “discards” a nation once it has played its part in the developmental scheme, while another nation takes its contribution to the next stage. This was thus also Hegel’s answer to Kant, who found it “disconcerting” that “earlier generations seem to perform their laborious tasks only for the sake of the later ones.”<sup>32</sup> For Hegel, the “monstrous sacrifices” made by nations and individuals are ultimately not in vain, for they are at the service of world history, which is above and beyond generational times.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the sacrifice and achievement of a nation is to be judged from the perspective of world history, not from the perspective of generations or peoples. This is also how Hegel reconciles the problem of Europe’s relationship to the Greeks, Romans, and even “Orientals.” Their contributions in the becoming of world history only reached fullness in modern Europe. Hegel confronted a more difficult problem while seeking to explain the present existence of peoples who have already played their part in history. His answer to the question is again profoundly developmental: these nations actually “belong to the past.”<sup>34</sup>

In the early twentieth century, a perceptive Indian critic of Hegel noted that according to the Hegelian philosophy of history, “what matters if Chinese, Hindu or Islamic culture and society are swept away from the surface of the earth if there still remains European culture,

---

<sup>32</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 6. For an excellent discussion of Hegel’s engagement with Kant’s philosophy of history, see Robert Bernasconi, “‘The Ruling Categories of the World’: The Trinity in Hegel’s Philosophy of History and the Rise and Fall of Peoples,” in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (London: Blackwell, 2011), 315-331.

<sup>33</sup> Hegel, *Lectures*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

which represents the culmination of human progress!”<sup>35</sup> The Hegelian philosophy of world history, as Radhakamal Mukerjee quite rightly noted, lends itself to such interpretation. And yet, as I have also argued, for Hegel, the emergence of Europe as the culmination of progress presupposes a world-historical development. Its superiority is born out of the movement of world history through successive stages of development across the globe.<sup>36</sup> All societies are part of the process that culminates in Europe—it is thus a hierarchical integration where the oneness of the universal necessarily requires a global hierarchy of societies and civilizations. There, however, remains an outstanding problem for Hegel. Is it pure accident that certain parts of the world are doomed to be consigned to backwardness while others will partake in the glory of the universal? What made world history unfold spatially in the way it did?

This is where the geographical dimension of Hegel’s philosophy of history becomes crucial, as he seeks to inscribe the temporal scheme of development on the map of the world. The vision of hierarchically integrated world is pivotal to the project. Insofar as the geographical basis is “the ground on which the spirit moves,” it is a “necessary and essential” criterion of world history. Hegel, however, is no geographical determinist. He notes that the essence of each nation is spiritually determined, but it is also “matched by a corresponding natural determinateness.”<sup>37</sup> Geography does not move world history; but it embodies the journey of progress in its externality. In the eighteenth century, the centrality of climate in Montesquieu’s

---

<sup>35</sup> Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Principles of Comparative Economics* vol. 2 (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1922), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel’s exclusion of Africa from the movement of world history is worth noting here. Hegel consigns Africa to “natural spirit” and argues that it has been stuck at “the threshold of world history” (190). For a critical study of Hegel on Africa, see Robert Bernasconi, “Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti,” in *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (Routledge: London, 2002), 51-73.

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, *Lectures*, 153.

account of Asiatic despotism exerted much influence (and he was not alone in emphasizing the importance of climate). Critical of such a climate-centric approach to geography, Hegel explicitly distances himself from the static understanding of climate as a political factor: “A great deal has been said about the mild Ionic sky which supposedly produced Homer...But the coast of Asia Minor has always been the same...nevertheless, only *one* Homer has arisen among the Ionic people.”<sup>38</sup> Climate can exert decisive influence only in unusually “torrid” and “cold” regions where it leaves no physical basis for freedom to develop.

Moving away from climate, Hegel prioritizes the relationality of a geographical space to the rest of the world. As a result, “the universal relation which is most important to history is that of land and sea.”<sup>39</sup> While Hegel divides continents into three groups of landmasses (uplands, river valleys, and coastal countries), the key determinant turns out to be their relationship to the sea. If Africa is “outside” of world history, it is not only because of its upland character but also because it has been “cut off” from the world. Asia, on the other hand, is stuck between upland and river valleys, which hampered the development of “their links with the maritime principle.”<sup>40</sup> It is only in Europe that the geographical diversity and environmental mildness are matched by a general openness to the sea. The practices of seafaring peoples—for all their risks and dangers—could elevate “acquisition and trade above their conscious level” and generate historical possibility for investing “European political life with the principle of individual freedom.”<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 154 (original emphasis).

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 156.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 194.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 161, 196.

Central to Hegel's formulation of development as a world-historical problem was the work of the geographer, Carl Ritter.<sup>42</sup> Hegel explicitly acknowledges his debt to Ritter twice in his *Lectures*—and the section on the geographical basis of world history in his *Lectures* strongly parallels Ritter's *Erkunde*. The primacy ascribed to the continents as the unit of geographical study was also Ritter's contribution. Ritter was primarily interested in explaining how the geographical constitution of the world plays a role in historical development. In seeking to think together geographical spaces with historical time, Ritter turned to a relational and comparative approach. He argued that the geographical location of each continent could only be understood comparatively—but this was a comparison ultimately grounded in the ontological primacy of the whole: “The earth is one; and through the agency of what we may call either time or history, all its parts are in ceaseless action and reaction on each other... and must be looked at together.”<sup>43</sup> The progress of one continent over other, therefore, is no isolated affair. On the one hand, Europe's rise partly owes to its privileged location on the map of the world, which allowed it to move freely between land and sea. On the other hand, Europe also benefited from its exposure to civilizational accomplishments in ancient Asia, which ultimately contributed to its historical development. For Ritter, nature bestowed Europe with an advantage, but it is the historical work of Europeans that ultimately transformed it into the most advanced continent. For Asia and Africa, it is the obverse: their relatively non-advantageous place on the map was coupled with a lack of historical labor. Ritter's foregrounding of the wholeness and relationality of the earth

---

<sup>42</sup> Carl Ritter (1779-1859) was Hegel's colleague at the University of Berlin and held the first chair in Geography there. The influence of Ritter on Hegel's work has gone relatively unnoticed (with the exception of a few historians of geographical thought). For a brief account of Ritter's influence on Hegel, see Dean W. Bond, “Hegel's Geographical Thought,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 1 (2014): 179-198.

<sup>43</sup> Carl Ritter, *Comparative Geography* (New York: American Book Company, 1865), 63-4.

rationalized the course of the historical development of world, thanks to its integration of the work of history and the ground of the earth in the same scheme.<sup>44</sup> It is thus not surprising that Ritter's geographical thought enabled Hegel to firmly plant the movement of history on the map of the world.

Thus emerged a resolutely global account of developmentalism. Hegel's philosophy of world history rendered the notion of development dependent on a globally unified order of space and time. The global character of Hegel's nineteenth-century account of developmentalism marks its distinction from the eighteenth-century stage theory of societal development. For the latter, the primary site of development is the society. Consider, for example, Adam Smith's account of development. Smith's stagist theory of societal development is tethered to the mode of subsistence, on the basis of which he identifies four progressive stages of development in any society (namely, hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial societies).<sup>45</sup> Smith's account of development is tied to the natural (and progressive) drive intrinsic to the society. The transition from one stage to another—or its lack thereof—is explained in terms of the societal and economic dynamics themselves. For Smith, societal development is simultaneously “a natural process” and driven by contingent and unpredictable impact of “myriad individual actions.”<sup>46</sup> Given his foregrounding of the societal basis and contingent forces integral to the developmental process, Smith was critical of European societies' capacity to effect progressive change in other

---

<sup>44</sup> This statement by Ritter sums up the developmental order of his comparative geography of the continents: “Europe may be considered as the branches and foliage of a great tree, whose trunks and roots are to be traced in Central Asia, Africa being a stunted side-shoot.” *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>45</sup> See Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 201-21.

<sup>46</sup> Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 32.

societies.<sup>47</sup> Insofar as Smith considered developmental drive to be intrinsic to society, he could argue that the imperial imposition of despotic rule hindered the progress of both the colonies and metropolis.<sup>48</sup> This is in marked contrast with Hegel, and a host of other nineteenth-century thinkers of development (e.g., the Mills, Tocqueville, Comte, and, to an extent, Marx). For Hegel, the narrative of developmental progress can only be told globally, as European “advancement” and non-European “backwardness” are both relationally constituted. The integration of the rest of the world in this account of development locks them together with Europe, if only to inscribe the vision of the unified world with an indelible hierarchy.

The colonies thus came to be signified as backwardness embodied. This developmental vision of colonial difference gave a new significance to colonial rule. As Hegel argues, the developmentally advanced location of European nations over backward non-European nations is what entitles them to rule over the colonies:

---

<sup>47</sup> For a reading of Smith on development that emphasizes his continuity with nineteenth-century thinkers, see John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 78-83. Hobson calls Smith’s account of development anti-paternalist, but ultimately Eurocentric because of its universalization of the scheme of European societal development. What I want to emphasize here is that Smith’s “anti-paternalism” was not unrelated to his theory of societal development: it was precisely because of the non-global conception of development that Smith could dissociate colonialism from progress.

<sup>48</sup> Eighteenth-century attempts to articulate the global were situated between the frameworks of societal development and human/cultural difference. Although Europe’s societal-developmental superiority was increasingly widely accepted, there were significant doubts concerning the historical and moral implications of its global reach through empire. See Bartelson, *Visions of World Community*, 115-140; Jennifer Pitts, “The Global in Enlightenment Historical Thought,” in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, eds. Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy and Andrew Sartori (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 184-196; see also Emma Rothschild, “Global Commerce and the Question of Sovereignty in the Eighteenth-Century Provinces,” *Modern Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 3-25.

“The same determination entitles civilized nations to regard and treat as barbarians other nations which are less advanced than they are in the substantial moments of the state (as with pastoralists in relation to hunters, and agriculturalists in relation to both of these), in the consciousness that the rights of these other nations are not equal to theirs and that their independence is merely formal.”<sup>49</sup>

The right of world history exceeds the right of those nations that are not on the same developmental level. It does not generate a higher political body to actualize itself (as in a global federation), since the international domain is where each state engages in “negation,” which for Hegel is an “essential component” for maintaining a state’s stability. Hegel thus dismissed Kant’s project for perpetual peace and found no necessity to overcome individual statehood.<sup>50</sup> It has been argued that Hegel’s failure to take the international sphere as the site of a higher form of universality is inconsistent with his philosophical method.<sup>51</sup> However, as this reading of Hegel’s philosophy of world history has suggested, his turn to world history was concerned more with why certain nations reached development necessary for sovereign statehood and why others did not. The “court” of world history, in other words, serves the purpose of explaining the reason behind global difference and the form of (imperial) right that emanates from it. Hegel does not need to commit to the oneness of a politically unified globe precisely because of his assumption that global difference itself is a manifestation of the “oneness” of reason.

The conceptual dependence of Hegel’s philosophy of history on a temporally and spatially hierarchical yet integrated vision of the world substantially complicates the project of

---

<sup>49</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 376.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>51</sup> See Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, “Hegel Contra Hegel in His Philosophy of Right: The Contradictions of International Politics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32, no.2 (1994): 241-263.

recuperating Hegelian universalism from its own prejudices.<sup>52</sup> In recent years, Susan Buck-Morss' study of Hegel's unacknowledged debt to the Haitian Revolution has occasioned a revisiting of the place of the colonies in Hegel's thought. Buck-Morss elegantly reconstructs how the contemporaneous Haitian Revolution might have spurred Hegel to conceive what is perhaps now the most iconic instance of his work—the master-slave dialectic. For Buck-Morss, while Hegel increasingly became more “bigoted” about non-Europeans in the ensuing decades, the promise of the Hegelian “universal human history” could still be rescued “from the uses to which white domination has put it.”<sup>53</sup> Buck-Morss underscores the necessity to overcome the bounded and essentialist vision of the world in Hegel's thought, though she maintains that the radical potential of Hegelian universal history ultimately lies in enabling us to have a “dialectical encounter with past.”<sup>54</sup> However, insofar as the Hegelian project of “universal history” conceptually presupposes (and re-enacts) a hierarchically integrated sense of the world, it is not—in my reading— theoretically possible to reconcile the Hegelian universal with a “porous” vision of global difference. By the same token, the attempt to fold the question of the colonies in Hegel's thought into the anticolonial concern over underdevelopment—and to claim that Hegel's hierarchical integration of the non-European world amounts to “cultural relativism”— misses the constitutively hierarchical vision of the world that underpins Hegelian philosophy of history.<sup>55</sup> Hegel's fundamental “confounding...[of] the regional and the universal” (to use Ranajit Guha's

---

<sup>52</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 74.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>55</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Borrowed Light: Hegel, Vico, and the Colonies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 102-105.

expression) is not amenable to easy analytical separation, inflecting as it did the global scope of Hegelian developmentalism.<sup>56</sup>

### **Liberal Imperialism and the Making of Hierarchical Peoplehood**

Hegel's turn to world history was a classic instance of the "owl of Minerva" beginning its flight "with the onset of dusk."<sup>57</sup> By the time Hegel began lecturing on the topic, there was a general shift with regard to the question of the colonies in British and German thought. The developmentalist turn in early nineteenth-century European political thought emerged—as the historian Jürgen Osterhammel puts it—against the backdrop of a larger "transformation of the world" itself. The "closing of distance" that began from the late eighteenth century—not to mention the simultaneous expansion of global empires and capitalism—conferred a strong sense of urgency on the problem of global difference.<sup>58</sup> Yet, as the necessity to theoretically confront the problem of difference intensified, the place of the non-European world in early nineteenth-century European thought only degraded. From around this period, the ubiquitous rise of developmental approaches to the human sciences in Europe resulted in a widespread undermining of the epistemic status of non-European objects of knowledge.<sup>59</sup> In imperial Britain, to which we move now, the genealogical source of developmental progress was plural, as older resources such as Whig historiography and conjectural history fused with newer enterprises such

---

<sup>56</sup> Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 45-113.

<sup>59</sup> On this point, see Jürgen Osterhammel, "'Peoples without History' in British and German Historical Thought," in *British and German Historiography 1750-1950: Traditions, Perceptions, and Transfers*, eds. Benedikt Stuchtey and Peter Wende (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 265-287.

as German romanticism and historicism.<sup>60</sup> While the most familiar version of the liberal imperial discourse of developmental progress would not become commonplace before the 1830s, the transformation had already begun with the publication of James Mill's monumental *History of British India* in 1817 (though he started working on it from 1806). Interestingly, Hegel's major source of knowledge about India was Mill's *History*.<sup>61</sup> Hegel, in turn, would prove to be important to the younger Mill's reconsideration of the framework of historical development.

The text would establish the elder Mill as the preeminent India expert in Britain, facilitating his appointment as a top executive at the East India Company. Marked by an "uneasy alliance" between utilitarianism and conjectural history, James Mill's global scope of development was more of an initiator of liberal imperialism than a continuation of his eighteenth-century Scottish predecessors.<sup>62</sup> The text launched a full-fledged assault on the orientalist such as William Jones who found pre-colonial Mughal and ancient Indian literary and philosophical resources worthy of intellectual respect and valuable for imperial governance. Consider, for example, this passage: "As the manners, institutions, and attainments of the Hindus, have been stationary for many ages...By conversing with the Hindus of the present day, we, in some measure, converse with the Chaldeans and Babylonians of the time of Cyrus; with

---

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion of the plural sources of Victorian historicism, see Mark Bevir, "Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain," in *Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain*, ed. Mark Bevir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1-20.

<sup>61</sup> Hegel's discussion of Indian political history and Hindu customs relies substantively on Mill's text. While Hegel does not mention directly James Mill in his lecture on India, there is clear evidence that he drew from Mill's text. The editors of the new critical edition of *Lectures* have found at least a dozen instances where Hegel was relying on Mill. See G.W.F Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, vol. 1, ed. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 277-286.

I thank Professor Robert Bernasconi for his advice on tracking Hegel's uses of Mill.

<sup>62</sup> Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 123-133.

the Persians and Egyptians of the time of Alexander.”<sup>63</sup> This effortless global measuring of developmental progress had no qualms in equating contemporary India with the times of Alexander. The globe was no longer a space marked by irreducible human or cultural difference; all such differences, on the contrary, could be classified in a universal scheme of developmental progress. Unlike Hegel, the elder Mill neither grappled with the philosophical stakes of a global discourse of development nor historicized the categories of developmental comparison. His relatively “underdeveloped” account of historical development collapsed the cognitive, material, and customary dimensions of non-European peoples to create a straight line of progress—an almost dyadic conception of development that often distilled into a crude separation between civilization and barbarism. This analytical poverty of the elder Mill’s conception of development would not be entirely lost on his son.

Mill’s text was also a response to the prevalent ideologies of imperial rule in Britain, especially with regard to India. Eighteenth-century British approaches to the newly acquired Indian territories were marked by attempts to forge an “ideology” of imperial rule through the discourse of ancient constitutionalism (which co-existed with the Montesquieu-inspired discourse of Asiatic despotism).<sup>64</sup> To reconcile empire with liberty, the eighteenth-century theorists of empire sought to ground the legitimacy of British rule by way of acquiring authorization from the pre-colonial Mughal “constitution.” The trial of Warren Hastings—which foregrounded political violence and unchecked exploitation by the Company—brought forth the tension inherent to this framework. While Hastings and Burke differed with regard to how India was to be politically treated, both worked within the pluralist framework of ancient

---

<sup>63</sup> James Mill, *History of British India*, vol. 2 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826), 190.

<sup>64</sup> On this point, see Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*, 1-31.

constitutionalism and shared a certain respect for the “Indian tradition.”<sup>65</sup> In the period following the trial of Hastings (and the major economic reform ushered in by Charles Cornwallis), the framework of ancient constitutionalism declined and the British rule in India witnessed a “Romanticist” turn.<sup>66</sup> In the two decades preceding Mill’s *History*, British rule in India was marked by a desire to retain “Indian tradition of personal government...and notions of Indian ‘difference.’”<sup>67</sup> The consolidation of Indian “difference” coexisted often with a defense of British Empire as an agent of improvement, though this moral idiom of improvement was still far removed from developmental historicism. In marked contrast from what James Mill would soon argue, some of these colonial administrators such as Thomas Munro found “India so distant from Britain, and so different, that it must have its own futures, one that built upon a foundation of Indian institutions, cultures and peoples under the watchful hand of architects like himself.”<sup>68</sup>

While James Mill initiated the absorption of difference into the global scope of developmental progress, the political framework that would decisively transform the question of the colonies for the rest of the century was articulated by the liberal imperialists of the next generation, most notably Thomas Babington Macaulay and John Stuart Mill. Having consigned

---

<sup>65</sup> On Burke and Hastings’ different notions of pluralism, see Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 92-117.

<sup>66</sup> As Eric Stokes argues, the “Romanticist” turn emerged out of a resistance to “applying British constitutional principles to the Indian administration.” The Permanent Settlement Act institutionalized by Cornwallis and administrative reform along the British tradition suggested by his successor, Richard Wellesley, faced resistance from a group of British administrators (Munro, Malcolm, Metcalfe et al.) who preferred to view India through the Burkean lens of “human society as a continuous community of the past, present, and future” (15). Eric Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India III.4: Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25.

<sup>68</sup> Burton Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 358.

India to the prehistory of Europe, James Mill's utilitarian suggestion was "light taxes and good laws; nothing more is wanting for national and individual prosperity all over the globe."<sup>69</sup> The purpose of such good government would be to maximize the "happiness" of Indians. The aim of political—or rather civilizational—reform was to elevate the state of Indians, but the utilitarian priorities of Mill led him to posit good government—rather than self-government—as the end of imperial rule. Mill's proposal to rationally reform the colonial state resonated with the colonial administrators rethinking the nature of British rule in India, even as his prejudiced rejection of the Indian past faced criticism.<sup>70</sup> For Macaulay as for J.S. Mill, the normative value of self-government transcended the question of utility.<sup>71</sup> This otherwise abstract affirmation of self-government would have important implications for the colonial question. If domestic democracy is compatible with foreign despotism, as Macaulay and Mill would argue, it is because imperial

---

<sup>69</sup> James Mill, *History of British India* vol. 5, 538.

<sup>70</sup> See Jon Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India, 1780-1835* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 133-170.

<sup>71</sup> The classic critique of James Mill is Macaulay's, "Mill on Government," in *Miscellaneous Writings of Lord Macaulay*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), 282-322. James Mill did consider representative institutions to be the best means for the end of individual happiness. But for backward peoples, Mill argued, good government should instead be prioritized. It is worth noting that in a letter to David Ricardo, Mill speculated if the societies in "low state of civilization" were left to their own devices, their own representative government might have been more beneficial than "any other government that would *emanate from themselves*." Having noted this point, Mill concluded that rule by an advanced civilization, despite all its evils, is preferable to native rule—representative or not. In any case, James Mill's preference for representative government was primarily on utilitarian grounds—he did not value it for its intrinsic worth in the way Macaulay and the younger Mill would.

See "Mill to Ricardo (14 August 1819)," in *The Work and Correspondence of David Ricardo* vol. 8 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 52-3 [emphasis added]. On James Mill's view of representation, see Richard Krouse "Two Concepts of Democratic Representation: James and John Stuart Mill," *Journal of Politics* 44, no.2 (1982): 509-537.

rule is a developmental project invested in instilling the capacity for self-government in the colonized.

This shift was eloquently captured in Macaulay's famous speech at the British parliament on the Government of India Act in 1833. The starting point of Macaulay was similar to James Mill's: the patent backwardness of India (in fact, he lauded the elder Mill, otherwise his rival, as the greatest expert on India).<sup>72</sup> Taking recourse to an orientalist caricature of Indian history, Macaulay argued that the British found the Indian people "ground down to dust" and on the verge of losing all "traces of the opulence and civilization of an earlier age." Indians were a people "debased by three thousand years of despotism and priestcraft." The British, in contrast, were "free...[and] civilized."<sup>73</sup> This stark contrast between civilization and barbarism directly echoes the elder Mill's *History*. Macaulay's repeated reference to the Indian people moves suggestively between the descriptive and normative senses of the term. Descriptively, the people concretely embodied the backward temporality. Macaulay ponders if the anarchic period between the decline of the Mughal Empire and the consolidation of British rule was not enough to "throw the people back whole centuries." The people, then, are a repository of developmental progress (or its lack thereof). The normative implication of the developmental location of a people comes to the fore when Macaulay asks: "[Is] representative government practicable in India"? "In Europe," argues Macaulay, "the people are everywhere perfectly competent to hold

---

<sup>72</sup> For an account of the convergence between the elder Mill and Macaulay's progressivist views of Indian history against the backdrop of their general philosophical divergence, see Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow "The Cause of Good Government: Philosophic Whigs versus Philosophic Radicals," in *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 91-126.

<sup>73</sup> T.B. Macaulay, "Government of India," in *Speeches and Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1874), 181, 197, 204.

some share...of political power.” Owing to the backwardness of Indian people, the fitness for representative government is utterly absent there. The form of rule that would fit the (not-yet) people is “enlightened and paternal despotism.” The double significance of the colonies as simultaneously backward and subjected—which I discussed in the preceding section—is evident in the speech. In Macaulay’s account, imperial rule thus takes the form of an advanced people ruling over a backward people. The British people were making a despotic exception for the purpose of self-government itself: “by good government we may educate our subjects into a *capacity* for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions.”<sup>74</sup> This framework of hierarchical peoplehood, then, helped resolve, however contentiously, the tension between empire and self-government. In the process, it transformed a debate about the status of Indian civilization into a hierarchy of peoplehood.<sup>75</sup>

The framework of hierarchical peoplehood would find its fullest expression in the work of John Stuart Mill. Mill refined Macaulay’s argument concerning imperial rule as a preparation for self-rule, but he also subtly departed from latter’s collapsing of the cultural and political aspects of non-European societies in an overarching framework of unfitness. Mill, however, was

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 204 (emphasis added).

<sup>75</sup> This point concerning a hierarchy of peoples has been touched upon by two scholars of imperial liberal thought: Bhikhu Parekh and Pratap Bhanu Mehta. Parekh’s essay “Superior People” addresses the question of the people mostly in a descriptive sense. Mehta’s essay focuses on the role of national character in Mill’s political thought and explores the hierarchical order of peoples (as nations) in Mill’s thought. As I hope to show further in the remaining part of the section, my use of the term “the people” involves both the historical (developmental) and national (essentialist) dimension of Mill’s thought, while relating them to the normative valences of the category of peoplehood. See Bhikhu Parekh, “Superior People: The Narrowness of Liberalism from Mill to Rawls,” *Times Literary Supplement* (25 February 1994): 11-13; Pratap B. Mehta, “Liberalism, Nation, and Empire: The Case of J.S. Mill,” in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 232-260.

hardly a champion of popular sovereignty— he is rightly remembered as a liberal critic of the dangers of mass democracy in the history of political thought. After all, Mill framed *On Liberty* as the retort to a novel threat to individual liberty (in addition to the threat posed by the political authority): the assumption that “the people have no need to limit their power over themselves.”<sup>76</sup> The risk inherent to the supremacy of the will of the people, Mill argued, is to devolve into a “tyranny of the majority.” Mill’s political theory was concerned as much with regulating institutional power as with the extra-institutional power exercised by the people. The concept of the people with which Mill operated had no Rousseauian inclination; the role of the people— for Mill as for most nineteenth-century liberal thinkers—was circumscribed to “the idea of an indirect sovereignty...under a modern national state.”<sup>77</sup> And yet Mill’s political theory was deeply marked by the question of peoplehood: it was central to how he reconciled abstract norms of representative government with imperial rule.

While discussing the normative scope of his account of liberty in *On Liberty* (1859), Mill added a (in)famous disclaimer: “Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one.”<sup>78</sup> The colonial exception would soon turn out to be more than an aberration, and he would go on to explore this question most elaborately in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). The general thrust of Mill’s argument

---

<sup>76</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and the Subjection of Woman* (NY: Henry Holt & Co., 1879), 13.

<sup>77</sup> On this point, see Duncan Kelly, “Popular Sovereignty as State Theory in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, eds. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 270-296.

<sup>78</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, 25.

is the claim that different stages of development require different political arrangements.<sup>79</sup> As Mill recounts in his autobiography while discussing his break from his father's strictly utilitarian theory of government: "In politics... I no longer accepted the doctrine of the *Essay on Government* as a scientific theory...I ceased to consider representative democracy as an *absolute* principle, and regarded it as a question of time, place, and circumstance."<sup>80</sup>

The clearest account of what constitutes the *political* backwardness of a society appears in his chapter on the "social conditions" that make representative government inapplicable:

"[Representative government] must be unsuitable in any case in which it cannot permanently subsist—i.e. in which it does not fulfil the three fundamental conditions... 1. That the people should be willing to receive it. 2. That they should be willing and able to do what is necessary for its preservation. 3. That they should be willing and able to fulfil the duties and discharge the functions which it imposes on them."<sup>81</sup>

The figuration of the people as the bearer of historical progress is noteworthy here: the "social conditions" (specific to the state of "general advancement") reflect on the people as a collective

---

<sup>79</sup> See also his remarks in the *Considerations*: "the proper functions of a government are not a fixed thing but different in different states of society—much more extensive in a backward than in an advanced state" (383).

While Mill does not theorize the exact nature of the "different stages of human progress," his account of civilization comprised both "property" and "power and acquirements of mind." See John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, vol. XVIII- Essays on Politics and Society Part 1*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 122.

<sup>80</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, vol. I-Autobiography and Literary Essays*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 177 (emphasis added).

<sup>81</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, vol. XIX-Essays on Politics and Society Part 2*, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 413.

entity. This assumption, in turn, enables him to relate the developmental location to popular will. For a people to be able to will (the representative form of) self-government, it must first learn to appreciate the value of representation through certain external—un-willed—means. The formation of the collective political will can only emerge after “a central power, despotic in principle though generally much restricted in practice, was mainly instrumental in carrying the people through a necessary stage of improvement.”<sup>82</sup> The question of “capacity” relates even more directly to a people’s “stage of civilization.” Consider, for example, what Mill takes to be one of the most important prerequisites in the people for representative government—obedience to political authority. For Mill, such a quality is unlikely to be present in the “savage” stage of civilization where struggle with nature and neighbors is the main preoccupation.<sup>83</sup> Such a capacity has to be instilled in the people from without—by a military leader or a prophet who would teach obedience without instituting self-government.

A people acquire the quality of obedience only after a historical journey through stages of development. The will and capacity to participate in government—which requires an overcoming of purely private interest— are equally products of historical progress. Furthermore, the sense of peoplehood (“a multitude of insignificant political units be welded into a people”), which should predate representative government, comes most advantageously from the experience of being ruled by a centralizing authority.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the political qualities that constitute the people—will, capacity, belonging, obedience, participation etc.— result from their state of

---

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, 416

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, 415.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

civilizational advancement.<sup>85</sup> The *people*, then, can only emerge at the highest stage of civilization.

\*\*\*

Though he never directly engaged with Hegel's work, Mill's theory of development shared plenty in common with the German philosopher. Mill's "Germano-Coleridgean" turn deepened his commitment to appreciations of "the laws of historical development and of the filiation of the different states of man and society." Although Mill confessed that he had not read Kant and Hegel directly, he also noted that the works by their "English and French interpreters" had been "extremely useful to [him]."<sup>86</sup> In this 1843 letter to Auguste Comte, Mill credited Hegel to be the most important theorist of historical development.<sup>87</sup> The result of this (indirect) encounter was a "real, if incomplete appreciation" of a richer notion of historical development. Echoing Hegel (and Comte), Mill likened the movement of progress to a mobile "van," which moves from one "advanced guard of the species" to another.<sup>88</sup> His appreciation of the role of antagonism as the "real security for continued progress" is also in continuity with the Hegelian

---

<sup>85</sup> One important result of Mill's grounding of the civilizational discourse in the developmental idiom of self-government, as Karuna Mantena notes, was the "shifting [of] the burden of imperial legitimation (and responsibility) onto colonized societies themselves" (301). See Karuna Mantena, "Mill and the Imperial Predicament," in *J.S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Assessment*, eds. Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 298-318.

<sup>86</sup> John Stuart Mill, "Letter to Auguste Comte," (13 March 1843) in *The Correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte*, trans., Oscar A. Haac (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 140. In another letter, Mill lamented the lack of British familiarity with the work of Victor Cousin who presented the "hazy" German ideas with "lucidity and systematic spirit." Cousin, among other things, was Hegel's first popularizer in France. *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>88</sup> J.S. Mill, "August Comte and Positivism" in J.S. Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. X, 318.

view of historical development.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the particular attention he gave to the role of the “speculative faculties” in ushering progress bears a Hegelian mark (in contrast to his father’s more straightforward uses of “intelligence”). Much like Mill, Auguste Comte too underplayed his debt to Hegel and claimed to have never read him. As we now know, Comte possessed translated copies of Hegel’s lectures on philosophy of history at the University of Berlin.<sup>90</sup> Comte’s philosophy of progress, holistic conception of society, and the role of antagonism in historical development shared a number of themes with Hegel.<sup>91</sup>

It has recently been argued that Mill’s appreciation of cultural difference can generate a more pluralist account of development.<sup>92</sup> The origin of such interpretations resides in Mill’s self-acknowledged break with a strictly rule-bound utilitarianism following the depressive phase he experienced in the late 1820s. His turn to a “Germano-Coleridgeian” approach facilitated an

---

<sup>89</sup> Mill, *Considerations*, 318.

<sup>90</sup> Mary Pickering discovered copies of Hegel’s writing and lectures at the Comte archive. For a detailed treatment of the Hegel-Comte connection, see Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 296-301.

<sup>91</sup> Comte’s exposure to Hegel appears to have been unknown to Mill: In one of the aforementioned letters, Mill noted that while he needed German philosophy (especially Hegel) to find a richer theory of historical development, Comte had already arrived there on his own. See *The Correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> This argument is most clearly articulated in Inder Marwah “Two Concepts of Liberal Developmentalism,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 15, no. 1 (2016): 97-123. See also Margaret Kohn and Daniel I. O’Neill, “A Tale of Two Indias: Burke and Mill on Empire and Slavery in the West Indies and America,” *Political Theory* 34, no. 2 (2006): 192-228. On Mill and nationality see Georgios Varouxakis, *Mill on Nationality* (London: Routledge, 2002). Varouxakis is alive to the distinction between civilizational and national character oriented arguments in Mill, but his conclusion does not distinguish the different implication of Mill’s despair regarding national character from the more fundamental exclusion on the basis of civilizational backwardness: “Mill had come to believe that the free representative government he was proposing was the most appropriate form of government only for a particular national character, that of the English and the Americans. For the rest he despaired of solutions. All he had to offer were hints” (74).

appreciation of the sedimented, emotional qualities of societal and individual lives. Mill's contribution in the Great Indian Education Debate of the 1830s is suggestive here. Against Macaulay's Anglicist position, he argued that the "moral and intellectual improvement of the people of India" requires a "cultivation of the Oriental languages."<sup>93</sup> Though Mill accepted the necessity to prioritize progressive development of the Indian people, he found it "chimerical" that their "mental cultivation" could be facilitated without taking vernacular languages and customs into account. This argument relates to Mill's later attempts to analytically separate the question of civilization from that of national character. His remarks on France, in particular, show an unwillingness to reduce the question of the national character to the question of developmental progress. While Mill took France to be more or less on the same level of historical development as England, he found their "national character" to be at odds with the ethos of representative government. The tendency in the French "character" to seek distinction and wield political power disrupts the possibility of consolidating representative government.<sup>94</sup>

It is interesting to note that this argument concerning the French difficulty to institute stable representative government appears in the same chapter where Mill elaborates on the political unfitness of backward colonies. There is, however, a significant difference. For Mill, the deficit of colonial peoplehood primarily lies in their backwardness, even as developmental progress might not necessarily generate a character best for representative government. Thus, the people who generally lack the will and capacity befitting an advanced civilization are categorically excluded from the realm of representative government. Indeed, while Mill's

---

<sup>93</sup> John Stuart Mill, "First Draft of a Court of Directors' Public Department Dispatch to India," in *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843*, eds. Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 232

<sup>94</sup> Mill, *Considerations*, 408-10.

commitment to the framework of historical development allowed him to staunchly argue against the naturalist defense of slavery, the same logic also led him to justify despotic rule over the colonies.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, even if backward peoples have “special requisites” needed for representative government, its institution might clash with the prior necessity of civilizational advancement.<sup>96</sup> The problem of national character, on the other hand, is treated as an essentialist inheritance (or, at any rate, national traits that change only very slowly). For a nation such as France, Mill argues, its national character deters it from making the “best use” of representative government.<sup>97</sup>

Mill is not always precise in his uses of terms such as “stage of civilization,” “state of society,” “national character,” and so on. While he generally employed “stage/state of civilization” and “state of society” interchangeably and distinguished it from the question of “character,” there are occasional instances when he also folded the question of “national character” into the “state of society.”<sup>98</sup> The source of Mill’s inconsistency most likely lies in his ambiguous resolution of the relationship between historical development and national character. His approach to this problem is best articulated in the chapter on ethology in *A System of Logic*. As he argued: “the character, that is, the opinions, feelings, and habits, of the people, though greatly the results of the state of society which precedes them, are also greatly the causes of the state of society which follows them; and are the power by which all those of the circumstances of

---

<sup>95</sup> See John Stuart Mill, “The Negro Question,” in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XXI—Essays on Equality, Law, and Education*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 87-95.

<sup>96</sup> Mill, *Considerations*, 413.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>98</sup> On this point, see Varouxakis, *Mill on Nationality*, 64-66.

society which are artificial, laws and customs for instance, are altogether moulded.”<sup>99</sup> In the remaining pages, through an engagement with August Comte, he sought to articulate the relationship between the “state of society” and “character” in more specific terms. Mill was a friendly critic of Comte’s account of the three stages of progress on the ground of its inadequate scientific substantiation, but his own attempt to articulate a more empirically minded approach to the interaction between “history” (i.e., change in the “state of society”) and “human nature” in the developmental process was left unresolved in the *Logic* (and he never revisited the problem with systematic intent).<sup>100</sup>

To be sure, Mill concluded the chapter on historical method with the claim that historical development is ultimately driven by the progress of “the speculative faculties of mankind.” But, given his assertion of the constitutive roles of material and moral elements in the developmental process and his non-voluntary understanding of the speculative faculties, the search for a better understanding of the developmental process remained elusive—and, at worse, amounted to a “tautology.”<sup>101</sup> The vague nature of Mill’s conception of how “history” and “human nature” relates might help explain occasionally inconsistent uses of terms such as the “state of society.” More importantly for our purpose, the integration of national character as an active agent in the

---

<sup>99</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume VIII -A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive, Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation (Books IV-VI and Appendices)*, ed. John M. Robson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 914.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 926.

<sup>101</sup> Alan Ryan—otherwise a sympathetic reader of Mill—concedes that this aspect of Mill’s account of development runs the risk of boiling down to the argument that “men will not do what they neither know about nor know how to do.” See Alan Ryan, *John Stuart Mill* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 169-186; On Mill’s theory of development and representative government (though Thompson mostly ignores the central question of the colonies), see also Dennis Thompson, *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 136-173.

developmental process—however imprecise it might be—accounts for why Mill could be open to the possibility that “different nations...may and do advance to improvement by different roads” (a point he made while comparing England and France).<sup>102</sup> Yet, this acceptance of the different roads of progress does not challenge or replace the theoretically prioritized criterion of developmental stages. Mill almost never entertained the possibility that the colonies could inherit developmental criteria of political fitness different than Europe. His recourse to developmentalist arguments in a late text such as the *Considerations* is, therefore, neither undercut by nor in necessary tension with the argument concerning national character. What is more, as we shall see below, Mill’s recognition of the specificity of national characters, coupled together with the discourse of development, often reinforced the backwardness of the colonies.

Since Mill’s account of progress is not a theory of teleological necessity, the backward, not-yet, people require an external intervention to evolve into *the* people: “their improvement cannot come from themselves, but must be superinduced from without.”<sup>103</sup> While Mill credits despotic regimes with advancing a people prior to the emergence of representative government, he is rather ambivalent about the extent to which native, non-European, despotisms can accomplish such a task. In the above-quoted disclaimer in *On Liberty*, Mill singled out Charlemagne and Akbar as two examples of progressive despotism. In the *Considerations*, while discussing how native despotic rulers occasionally facilitated great improvements, Mill omits Akbar and instead discusses Charlemagne and Peter the Great.<sup>104</sup> This was not an accident. Mill addressed directly the limits of progress under Asian despotism earlier in the text. He notes that

---

<sup>102</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XII -The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848 Part I*, ed. Francis E. Mineka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963) 43 (letter of 7 November 1829).

<sup>103</sup> Mill, *Considerations*, 295.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

“Egyptian hierarchy” and the “paternal despotism of China” were “fit” for carrying those peoples to a limited extent. But because of their lack of “mental liberty and individuality,” these institutions failed to make further progress. He then contrasts the “stationary” Hindu civilization with the Jewish tradition. The “antagonism of influence” internal to the Jewish tradition, Mill argues, propelled it to continual progression. The lack of such intrinsic progressive drive, in contrast, is what makes India, China and other Asian peoples stagnant.<sup>105</sup> This argument also shows the limits of Mill’s cultural plurality, as he clearly found certain traditions to be a hindrance to the march of progress.

Mill’s preferred solution for places such as India was thus despotic rule by the advanced British nation. However, independent self-government—and not any imperial federation—was the ideal he located as the end of development under imperial rule. He emphatically argued that “the conquerors and the conquered cannot...live together under the same free institutions.”<sup>106</sup> He was also critical of the prospect of a shared and united political sovereignty for Britain and its distant colonies, since the latter are “separated by half the globe” and lack a common “public.”<sup>107</sup> Crucially, Mill considered parliamentary rule over India—which would amount to the British people (through their representatives) ruling over Indians—to be detrimental to the development of the colonies. Given the shortsightedness and self-interest of a foreign people, their direct rule was unlikely to be beneficial for Indians. He instead preferred rule by his employer, the East

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 397-8. This also shows the problem of arguing—as Kohn and O’Neill (2006, 218) do—that Mill considered European imperial despotism to be a stand-in for native despotism. Insofar as he contended that Indian and Chinese despotism could not advance historical development because of their intrinsic cultural limits, Mill’s developmentalist argument does not fully avoid essentialist biases.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 550.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 564 See also Duncan Bell, “John Stuart Mill on Colonies,” *Political Theory* 38, no. 1 (2011): 34-64.

India Company—a private enterprise more directly engaged with Indian problems and not susceptible to popular opinions. Mill’s criticism of “direct” rule by the British people themselves has led Nadia Urbinati to argue that he considered colonialism and representative government to be fundamentally incompatible, as his defense of East India company rule was predicated on the necessity to avoid “imperialistic domination by the English people through the political branches of their government.”<sup>108</sup> However, as I argued above, Mill’s defense of direct rule by the Company was based on pragmatic grounds, not on a fundamental questioning of the sovereignty of an advanced people over an inferior one. Furthermore, what ultimately makes an English private potentate such as the Company a legitimate ruler is their position as the indirect agent of an advanced people. Mill’s resistance to parliamentary rule over India thus does not challenge—but rather is enabled by—the global hierarchy of peoplehood.

No other nineteenth-century political thinker devoted as much attention as Mill to theorizing the relationship between the double signification of the colonies: historical backwardness and political subjection. Unlike Macaulay’s project of instilling European knowledge as the main vehicle of progress and the elder Mill’s undifferentiated globalization of utilitarian government, he sought to work out the specific political arrangement fit for backward peoples. While one could argue that Mill accommodated cultural difference as an integral part of developmental progress, his understanding of the “will and capacity” required for self-government remained moored to the advanced developmental stage located in the Euro-American world. This developmental reasoning also bled into Mill’s views on domestic questions such as parliamentary representation of British working class. The developmentalist

---

<sup>108</sup> See Nadia Urbinati, “The Many Heads of the Hydra: J.S. Mill on Despotism,” in *J.S. Mill’s Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment*, eds. Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 78.

argument would be equally present in his rejection of universal franchise for the working class: “no lover of *improvement* can desire that the predominant power should be turned over to persons in the mental and moral condition of the English working classes.”<sup>109</sup> Yet what Mill suggested in this case was not a despotic exception; instead, he advocated for gradual integration by prioritizing educational qualification of the working class.<sup>110</sup> The relative backwardness of the working class, in other words, was not a disqualification of English peoplehood, unlike the peoples of the colonies.

## Conclusion

How should difference be conceptualized and normatively regulated had been a concern for European and non-European thought since the era of colonial encounters. The justifications for (and critiques of) colonialism—from the Lockean defense of the conquest of the Americas to Mills’ progressivist case for imperial rule—were by no means discursively continuous, even if they all ultimately served the purpose of legitimating imperialism in various ways. This chapter has sought to recuperate the specificity of the developmental approach to the colonies. As European imperialism was bringing almost all of Asia and Africa under its rule and as the map of the earth was acquiring its now familiar contours, the “shrinkage of the globe”—to use Arendt’s expression—imputed a new urgency to the question of global difference.<sup>111</sup> One way in which

---

<sup>109</sup> Mill, *Collected Works vol. XIX*, 327 (emphasis added).

<sup>110</sup> Mill’s more robust defense of gender equality, as Linda Zerilli argues, was related to his developmental approach to the working class: “On closer examination...[Mill’s] argument for [female] suffrage turns out to be justification for increased intervention into the social. Women would be the executors of reform, the volunteers who would reduce the crushing expense of reform, and the superintendents of Poor Law reform.” Linda M.G. Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 124.

<sup>111</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 250.

the “shrinkage of the globe” manifested itself was the nineteenth-century urge to *historically* unify the globe. This new framework of development marked a break from human-centric and naturalist conceptions of difference. As Hegel further clarified, the developmental turn relies on an underlying image of a hierarchical-yet-unified vision of the globe. All that was divergent about far-flung societies appeared to be merely an earlier moment of historical development rather than markers of irreducible or immeasurable difference. Colonial difference was thus interpreted as problems within a shared, global process of development. Though Mill and other British thinkers did not explicitly reckon with the philosophical shifts that made possible historical comparison across societies, the same notion of development (i.e., global and non-anthropocentric) was central to their approach to colonial difference. Precisely for this reason, the broad encapsulation of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century accounts of development under the framework of “human development” obscures the specificity of the latter.<sup>112</sup>

This stress on recuperating the distinctiveness of the nineteenth-century framework of development is more than a dispute over periodization. The nineteenth-century paradigm of developmentalism—and its hierarchically unified global vision—fundamentally historicized the normative scope of imperial as well as anticolonial political thought. As I have argued through my reading of J.S. Mill, the liberal imperialists had overcome the democratic dilemma of development—i.e., the universality of norms and the unevenness of the facts of progress—by arguing that different developmental locations necessitate different political arrangement. The central place of the category of peoplehood emerges in this conjuncture. The liberal-imperialist project of reconciling domestic self-government with foreign despotism rooted the imperial

---

<sup>112</sup> See Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

claim to rule on the ground of not-yet colonial peoplehood. The colonized people came to politically embody the backwardness ascribed to the colonies, which simultaneously disqualified their claim to rule. This political recasting of the discourse of historical development in terms of peoplehood had resulted in a picture of the globe comprised of a graded hierarchy of peoples. The hierarchy of peoplehood was both dependent on and analytically distinct from the hierarchy of developmental times. The former rendered the latter admissible to the normative framework of democracy: the despotic rule over the colonies was no longer a pre-democratic exception but rather a developmental aid for the sake of democracy itself.

The liberal-imperialist turn in the more abstract ideologies of empire also came to be matched by the desire to institute a new order in India, even if the liberal imperialists had no overwhelming control over concrete administrative policies.<sup>113</sup> The legitimation of empire began to adopt the language of “democratic” justification from the second quarter of the nineteenth century. However, the source of the enduring legacy of liberal imperialist thought in the colonial world primarily lay in its widespread circulation among Indian thinkers themselves. The majority of nineteenth-century Indian political thinkers subscribed to a global and non-anthropocentric discourse of development. Liberal imperialist thought also structured the terms of the Indian critique of empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. Still, nineteenth-century Indian liberals—who extricated the discourse of development from its residual essentialist biases—were no less susceptible to the deferral of the time of democracy than their metropolitan counterparts. This deeper inheritance would reinforce the suspension of colonial peoplehood even for Indian thinkers critical of colonial rule. In the following chapter, I trace how the entwined problems of

---

<sup>113</sup> See Thomas Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India III.4: Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jon Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, 133-160.

developmentalism and colonial peoplehood came to pervade the originary moments of the anticolonial democratic project in nineteenth-century India.

## Chapter 2

### **The Birth of the People: Colonial Liberalism and the Origins of the Anticolonial Democratic Project**

#### **Introduction**

Head bowed, they stand  
Speechless—In their pale faces is written  
The pitiful story of a thousand years' agony  
The burden on their shoulder piles high; sluggish,  
They toil on till the last breath.

...

To these ignorant, emaciated, dumb faces  
Speech has to be given—  
Inside these exhausted, sapless, broken hearts  
Hope has to be voiced.

(Rabindranath Tagore, Turn me Back Now)<sup>1</sup>

These vivid lines are from a poem written by Rabindranath Tagore in the final decade of the nineteenth century, addressing his struggle between worldly and otherworldly impulses. The figure of the people appeared as a synecdochal marker of the world outside—the oppressed yet voiceless masses standing for the urgency of worldly action. This jarring picture of the Indian masses was not far removed from the more prosaic rhetoric of Tagore's contemporary political thinkers: the people, the supposed sovereign of the democratic age, appeared to be so

---

<sup>1</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, "Ebar Firao More," [Turn me Back Now] in *Chitra* (Kolkata: Kalidas Chakrabarty, 1896), 18-19 [my translation].

“miserable” as to be incapable of assuming their political mantle. From Naoroji to Banerjea, Indian political thinkers of the age worked relentlessly to insert this figure of the Indian masses into the world of empire and liberalism.<sup>2</sup> They articulated a project of sovereignty through self-government while campaigning relentlessly for—though, crucially, not in the name of—the people. The people appeared in the guise of an amorphous collective, starving and speechless. Still, this was no longer the poverty of mere subjects, but that of the (not-yet) people whose plight had a new political meaning.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of the people made an unceremonious entrance into Indian political thought with all its normative weight and historical traces. The rise of the economic critique of colonialism brought into view an immiserated “social” body of the people: starved, deprived, and weak.<sup>3</sup> The lesson of political modernity, Pierre Rosanvallon argues, is that “the people is a political proposition before it is a sociological fact.”<sup>4</sup> The Indian liberals were acutely aware of the distinction between the people as a “sociological fact” and as a “political proposition.” But they held that a progressive transformation of the “social” body of the people is the prior condition of its claim to

---

<sup>2</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, *Selected Speeches and Writings of Dadabhai Naoroji* (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., 1917), 117.

<sup>3</sup> Manu Goswami has rightly argued that the turn to political economy helped produce the “national space” in late nineteenth-century India. Yet, as we shall see, the formation of the national space was no less shaped by the figure of the destitute masses whose national boundedness could not account for the “deficit” of sovereign peoplehood. See Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 209-241. On the rise of “economic nationalism” in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, see also Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2010 [1966]).

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. Samuel Moyn (NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 82.

sovereignty. The problem of transforming the masses into *the* people thus came to be at the center of the nineteenth-century Indian project of self-government. Forged in a fraught exchange with British liberal-imperialist thought, this account of self-government was not so much about affirming the right of a people to form its own government. It was instead an argument for self-government for those who had not yet earned the claims of peoplehood. Instead of contesting the liberal-imperial account of “backward” Indian masses, the colonial liberals turned the premise of backwardness against the colonial administration to justify Indian participation in the government. In the process, Dadabhai Naoroji and his colleagues played a globally pioneering role in untethering developmentalism from its original mooring in the civilizational discourse.

Between the rise of British rule in the eighteenth century and the heady decades of anticolonial resistance in the twentieth, the nineteenth century hangs in the balance in the historiography of colonial India. More often than not, the century stands as a proverbial midwife between a past that was *fait accompli* (imperial subjection) and a future that was still distant (postcolonial founding). As we shall see, the conceptual contours of the anticolonial democratic project were already well articulated by the end of the nineteenth century. The program of representative government emerged as the stated ideal of political activism, as did the frameworks of economic and political critique of colonial rule. Yet, the concrete political agenda on the part of these Indian actors was decidedly minimalist and posed no challenge to imperial sovereignty. Historians traditionally resorted to the processes of social transformation to explain the political fortunes of the period, ranging from the historicist narratives of stunted modernization to strictly social-interest-based accounts.<sup>5</sup> By all accounts, nineteenth-century

---

<sup>5</sup> For a reading of Indian liberalism as a “caricature” of European “bourgeois” liberalism, see Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4-5; for a social-interest-based account that portrays late

Indian thinkers fell short of both the standards of emerging anticolonialism and the contemporaneous European “bourgeois-liberalism.” For most of the twentieth century, then, this archive was read in reference to what it was not.

With the global turn in the scholarship on imperial and anticolonial thought, intellectual historians have made a concerted effort to reconsider the political thought of nineteenth-century India. The category of liberalism has been central to this new turn. The reckoning with the imperial origins of liberalism in the history of political thought gave a renewed importance to the colonial side of the story. The narratives of colonial liberalism usually begin with the iconic, early nineteenth-century thinker, Raja Rammohun Roy and conclude in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century with the emergence of what is generally categorized as anticolonial nationalism. The century-long arc of colonial liberalism is held together by the persistence of a set of liberal motifs (or, to be more precise, what came to be classified as “liberal” in the twentieth century): constitutionalism, representative government, rule of law, and so on. This has enabled historians of Indian political thought to place the arguments of nineteenth-century thinkers in the context of a global discourse of liberalism as opposed to that of twentieth-century anticolonial thought. For C.A. Bayly, who has helped revive the study of colonial liberalism, Indian liberalism was different in its emphasis on the communitarian dimension of liberty, though equally assertive of liberal rights such as the freedom of the press.<sup>6</sup> The political project of Indian liberals was marked by an attempt to “rewrite the liberal discourse so as to strip it of its coercive colonial features and re-empower it as an indigenous ideology, but one still pointing

---

nineteenth-century Indian political effort as self-interested collaboration, see Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6.

towards universal progress.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, accepting the relative absence of concern about the “constraints on state power for the sake of individual freedom,” Rochana Bajpai finds the strong persistence of a liberalism of positive liberty in nineteenth-century Indian thought.<sup>8</sup> According to other recent interpretations, the nineteenth-century Indian turn to political economy made possible the deployment of the “logic of commercial society” to forge a liberal imagination<sup>9</sup> and enabled “intervention in both Indian and British politics on equal terms, bypassing and discrediting arguments about cultural difference.”<sup>10</sup>

This chapter shares the aim to read nineteenth-century Indian thought on its own terms, but it departs from the ways in which colonial liberalism is usually periodized and its global exchanges are theorized. The loosely defined yet overarchingly deployed framework of liberalism has clouded from view the co-constitution of democratic and liberal ideals in nineteenth-century India. I suggest that the replacement of the ideal of “good government” with that of “self-government” had fundamentally transformed the problem-space of late nineteenth-century Indian political thought. The subdued, almost imperceptible, metamorphosis of imperial subjects into the people had momentous effect on imperial as well as anticolonial political thought: the understanding of the source and end of government transformed, along with the structure of political authorization. Much of the transformation first took place at the discursive level and resulted in no direct political challenge to imperial sovereignty. The effect of this

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>8</sup> Rochana Bajpai, “Liberalism in India: A Sketch,” in *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden*, eds. Ben Jackson and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53-76.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 68-108.

<sup>10</sup> See Vikram Visana, “Vernacular Liberalism, Capitalism and Anti-Imperialism in the Political Thought of Dadabhai Naoroji,” *Historical Journal* 59, no.3 (2016): 775-797.

transformation is most evident in the new normative ideals that guided the colonial politics of representation. The emergence of the democratic ideal, however, had paradoxically pushed the time of democracy into a distant future. Given the success of the liberal-imperial argument that the enactment of democracy requires a certain developmental fitness of the people, the very figure of the colonial people appeared to be unfit as a collective for the institution of modern representative government. The Indian liberals agreed on the lack of peoplehood of the masses: the fact failed to meet the demand of the norm. Still, they refused to leave the task of transforming the masses to the British and contested the meaning of what constitutes development. The Indian career of the ideal popular sovereignty would begin with no dramatic announcement of its arrival.

In most accounts of colonial liberalism, Rammohun Roy features as the determinate origin point of the liberal tradition that culminated later in the century. For others, his writings are the precocious epitome of nineteenth-century liberalism, untainted by the “indigenist nationalism” of his successors.<sup>11</sup> In short, Rammohun sits at the heart of the narratives of colonial liberalism. Born in the early years of British rule in Bengal in the 1770s, Rammohun’s extraordinary intellectual training spanned the major intellectual traditions of precolonial India (Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic) as well as contemporary European enlightenment thought. As we shall see, his intellectual frameworks—especially the enlightenment framework of reason and the politics of liberty—were primarily inherited from the eighteenth century. Rammohun wrote extensively on the terms of interpreting India’s precolonial resources while responding creatively to the imperial remaking of the world. He campaigned for the reform of Hinduism, agitated against the curtailing of press freedom, demanded separation of power, and enthusiastically

---

<sup>11</sup> See Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 68-108.

embraced the cause of the British Reform Act of 1832. Rammohun's globe-spanning intellectual interests would come to be matched by a "transnational fame."<sup>12</sup> His contemporary admirers ranged from Jeremy Bentham to the American abolitionists.<sup>13</sup>

Rammohun's pursuit of an empire of liberty is important to our story for two reasons. In Rammohun's thought, the Indian masses—or the "natives" (in the parlance of his days)—figured as agents whose exercise of reason was crucial to the institution of good government. For Rammohun, the problem at stake was whether Indians could exercise reason without abandoning inherited resources—or what he called "ancient traditions." As his indirect encounter with James Mill will help illustrate, there were only faint traces of the emerging paradigm of developmentalism or liberal imperialism in Rammohun. Second, the overarching concerns of Rammohun's Montesquieuan vision of "good government" were the separation of powers and civil rights. The "improvement" of the (subject-) people was a given responsibility of the government; the state of peoplehood had no bearing on the abstract norms that constituted the universal criteria of good government. The concluding section of the chapter will address how the "liberal" interpretation of Rammohun began to take place in the post-WWII context and consolidated only in the past two decades. As Duncan Bell has shown in the Euro-American context, the formation of liberalism as a coherent category—from free market to representative government—is mostly a twentieth-century affair.<sup>14</sup> In the twentieth century, the retrospective

---

<sup>12</sup> Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohan Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMilla, 2010), 1.

<sup>13</sup> A pamphlet submitted to the US Congress by the abolitionists in the early 1830s was signed off as "Rammohun Roy." The author of the pamphlet added that: "In closing this address, allow me to assume the name of one of the most enlightened and benevolent of the human race now living, though not a white man, Rammohun Roy." See Adrienne Moore, *Rammohun Roy and America* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1942), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Duncan Bell, "What is Liberalism?" *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (2014): 682-715.

gaze of the liberal framework pulled Rammohun far closer to his late-nineteenth-century successors, undermining his moorings in the age of reason. His commitment to the freedom of the press, for example, emerged as a readily given evidence of a precocious liberalism, while the normative universe within which the commitment was located faded. Though I will be using the phrase “Indian liberals” to refer to late nineteenth-century Indian thinkers (namely, Naoroji, Banerjea, and Dutt), my aim in the following section is not to adjudicate if Rammohun was indeed a liberal; it is rather to trace how the conceptual and normative assumptions of Indian political thought subtly changed from the age of Rammohun Roy to that of the first generation of Congress thinkers. It is in the space between Rammohun and the late nineteenth-century Indian thinkers that the origins of the anticolonial democratic project are to be found.

For all their affirmation of “constitutional agitation,” the founding generation of the Indian National Congress had already moved on to a question prior to constitutionalism: the problem of peoplehood. Imperial subjection was no longer a fact of the world that needed to be constitutionally regulated so as to maintain the liberty of subjects. Empire instead came to be interpreted as the consequence of the historical absence of Indian peoplehood. To this extent, the Indian liberals affirmed the liberal-imperialist re-signification of empire as a preparation of democracy. They also turned to the language of peoplehood to render legible political grievances and aspirations. While the colonial state defended a British-led development of the masses, the Indian liberals proposed that the best way to ensure development would be to include the “advanced” sections of the society in the government. They contended that the continued underdevelopment of the colonized is the result of the Indian exclusion from the government. It is in this context that the Indian liberals turned to the works of liberal imperialists, especially that of John Stuart Mill, to mount a developmental defense of self-government. Yet the surprising

appropriation of Mill for Indian self-government would result in an unwitting vindication of the more fundamental premise of Millian liberalism: the sovereignty of the advanced people over their backward counterparts. The Indian liberals accepted the deferred sovereignty of the colonized but departed from Mill's aim to shelter imperial rule abroad from the internal dynamics of British democracy. Unmediated access to the "English people," as opposed to an enlightened intermediary, was to be the political hallmark of Indian liberalism.

As we shall see in the second section of the chapter, the ambiguous Indian-liberal uses of term self-government show the crucial way in which the question of democracy held together the premises of empire and liberalism. Imperial (as well as Indian) liberalism drove a wedge between the two prongs of modern democracy: self-government (understood as popular participation in government) and popular sovereignty. For metropolitan liberals such as John Stuart Mill, self-government is a meaningful idea only when it is anchored in the "will and capacity" of the people. But liberal imperialism already imbued the despotic government with liberal promises and with the power to not just "train" the colonized people but also to historically transform them into a people fit for democracy. Working within this divide, Indian liberals defined self-government as the political participation of the "advanced" sections of the people, while anchoring it in the liberal promise of empire. The result was an affirmation of the sovereign authority of the British people at the cost of further deferring Indian peoplehood. The modern career of democracy in the colonial world began with a constitutive split between sovereignty and government, where the latter worked against the former. What the colonial-liberal problem of developing a sovereign people through self-government ultimately reveals is the troubled origins of popular sovereignty on a global scale.

## Rammohun Roy, or “Liberalism” before Self-Government

“From the late unhappy news [the overthrowing of the Neapolitan constitutional government], I am obliged to conclude that I shall not live to see liberty universally restored to the nations of Europe and Asiatic nations, especially those that are European colonies...I consider the cause of the Neapolitans as my own, and their enemies, as ours.”

(Rammohun Roy, 1821)<sup>15</sup>

Rammohun Roy’s trip to England in 1831 was highly publicized and generated great public interest in the heart of the empire. This long tour—his first and last (as he died in Bristol in 1833)—brought him in conversation with the luminaries of British public life, including Jeremy Bentham, Benjamin Disraeli, William Godwin, Robert Owen, and James Mill. Bentham floated the idea of Rammohun running as a member of the British Parliament, while the phrenologists obsessed over the “learned Hindu” to prove or disprove hypotheses about race and intelligence. For his part, Rammohun vigorously campaigned for the political demands and rights of Indians, and enthusiastically took up the cause of the Reform Bill.<sup>16</sup> During the tour, Rammohun was invited by a Select Committee of the House of Commons to share his opinions on a number of Indian issues. He was asked pointedly about the “conditions” of the Indian people—physical, material, and moral. While his response to the question concerning the physical condition of the people focused primarily on climate and diet, he found it more difficult to directly address the “moral condition of the people.”<sup>17</sup> Rammohun first noted that European opinions about “native” peoples, both favorable and unfavorable, are based on faulty generalizations, resulting in a monolithic view of the native population. In contrast, he chose to answer the question by

---

<sup>15</sup> Rammohun Roy, “Letter to Mr. Buckingham,” in *The English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogesh Chunder Ghose (Allahabad: Panini Office, 1906), 923.

<sup>16</sup> See Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy*, 1-8.

<sup>17</sup> Rammohun Roy, “Additional Questions Respecting the Condition of India,” in *The English Works of Rammohun Roy*, ed. Jogesh Chunder Ghose (Allahabad: Panini Office, 1906), 295-6.

dividing the broad category of the native people into different classes: villagers, city-dwellers, professional classes. The peasants and villagers, Rammohun observed, “are as innocent, temperate, and moral in their conduct as the people of any country whatsoever.”<sup>18</sup> The city-dwellers and professionals who are in interaction with people from different “civilizations” tend to be inferior in their moral commitments. Nonetheless, Rammohun adds, there are plenty of people from these two classes who had “real merit, worth and character.” The questions probed further the economic and cultural practices of the natives, leading to the query: “what capability of improvement do they [the Indian people] possess?” Rammohun’s terse answer to the question could not have been more unequivocal: “They have the same capability of improvement as any other civilized people.”<sup>19</sup> Such confident dismissal of the “inferiority” of the Indian people would not be repeated again with the same force in the rest of the century.

Given Rammohun’s enduring status as the originator of all things modern in colonial India, very few of his interpreters have paused to ask: what exactly “improvement” or “civilization” meant for Rammohun? In what way did he evaluate the criteria of “inferiority” or the very notion of “native” peoplehood? The stakes of these questions are more than scholastic. Rammohun’s work is crucial to understanding the ascendance of developmentalism in Indian political thought, even as his own intellectual preoccupations predated and only passingly grappled with the emerging developmental tropes. Rammohun witnessed the crumbling of the precolonial political order as well as the emergence of a novel form of transnational imperial rule in early colonial India. He shared in the eighteenth-century enlightenment faith in the universal purchase of reason and in the commitment to across imperial space. What his work also

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 299.

illustrates is how the framework of liberty came to be displaced by a developmental vision of democracy. My aim is thus not to posit Rammohun as a lost alternative to developmentalism or to judge Rammohun's successors on his mirror, for the meaning of imperial subjection would sharply change in the decades following Rammohun's death.

Rammohun's humanist approach to colonial difference emerged out of his background in monist theology. His theological writings were preoccupied with resolving the tension between "reason" and "tradition." Born to a Hindu Brahmin family, Rammohun's early intellectual training was in Islamic theology, and he wrote primarily in Persian.<sup>20</sup> When exactly Rammohun began to be acquainted with contemporary European thought is a matter of contention among scholars.<sup>21</sup> Very little of his writings from the first phase of his career survived. The earliest surviving text, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (translated both as *A Gift to Monotheists* and *A Gift to Deists*), written in Persian with an Arabic preface, offered a rationalist defense of monotheism. The text disqualified the special claims of revelation and proposed that metaphysical as well as moral principles should be premised on reason. Organized between the dyad of "nature" and "custom," the *Tuhfat* attributes to the latter the plural character of religious beliefs and practices across societies.<sup>22</sup> Rammohun found the belief in a supreme being and the soul to be the touchstones of rational theology, but the dominance of custom—which makes the "individuals of mankind blind and deaf notwithstanding their having eyes and ears"<sup>23</sup>—had historically replaced

---

<sup>20</sup> For an account of Rammohun's early intellectual formation, see Sophia Dobson Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Calcutta: A.C. Sarkar, 1913), 5-9.

<sup>21</sup> On this debate, see Dilipkumar Biswas, *Rammohan-Samiksha* (Kolkata: Saraswata Library, 1983), 48-63 [Bengali].

<sup>22</sup> Rammohun Roy, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* [A Gift to Monotheists] (Calcutta: S.K. Lahiri & Co., n.d.), iii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

the enterprise of reason. In this early work, the problem of custom was essentially one of “deception.” Indeed, Rammohun divides the mankind into four groups: deceivers, deceived, self-deceived who help delude others, and the undeceived.<sup>24</sup> Inductive reason is sufficient to avoid deception and demystify the “wonderful inventions of the people of Europe” or “the dexterity of jugglers.”<sup>25</sup> The text is also striking for its deployment of conjectural history motifs to explain how different religions evolved into customs detached from reason. Its rejection of miracles was presented as a conjectural-historical rather than as a purely speculative argument.<sup>26</sup> There are thus good reasons to assume that Rammohun, at least partially, was familiar with the conjectural-historical style of eighteenth-century European enlightenment thought by the time he wrote the *Tuhfat*.

Rammohun’s mature theological writings would depart from this strong opposition between nature (reason) and custom (tradition), though the former continued to be central to his thought. Throughout the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, he would publish widely in Bengali, English, and Sanskrit to advance a new understanding of the Hindu scriptures,

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 24. This account of prophethood—and especially the centrality of “deception” to the origin of prophethood—is quite unmistakably Voltairean. Rammohun did not seem to have acquired reading knowledge of French until very late in his life, but Voltaire was widely translated in English in the eighteenth century. Since Rammohun did not mention any of Voltaire’s work by name (but he did invoke the authority of Voltaire), it is difficult to definitely establish which texts of Voltaire he might have been reading. In particular, Voltaire’s *An Essay on Universal History, the Manners and Spirit of Nations* (1756) was in high circulation in the English-speaking world. For a broad survey of Voltaire on priestcraft, see John Marshall, “Voltaire, Priestcraft and Imposture: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam,” *Intellectual History Review* 28, no. 1 (2018):167-184.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>26</sup> The distinction of the *Tuhfat*’s “psychological and sociological” rationalism from the prevalent “speculative” rationalism of eighteenth-century Indian thought has been underscored by the unnamed author of “Date of the *Tuhfat*,” which accompanied the D.N. Pal edition of the text. See “Date of the *Tuhfat*” in *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin*, xxxiii.

especially the Vedanta. Rammohun's overarching goal in those numerous treatises and translation was to defend a nondualist interpretation of divinity in the Hindu scriptures. Instead of directly controverting the authority of scriptures, he now took them as an ancient repository of reason. Moving away from the deception-centric framework, he suggested that the "idolatrous" portions of the scriptures are "allegorical adoration of the true Deity": their purpose was to guide "those whose limited understandings rendered them incapable of comprehending...the invisible Supreme Being."<sup>27</sup> A careful reading of the scripture ultimately reveals nothing contrary to reason. This argument was not limited to the Hindu scriptures. Rammohun would publish his own version of the New Testament, a collection of moral precepts devoid of miraculous and trinitarian elements.<sup>28</sup> Yet, he also added, reason by itself is inadequate for the purpose of interpretation, as it generates "universal doubt, incompatible with principles on which our comfort and happiness mainly depend."<sup>29</sup> This realization led Rammohun to attribute special importance to the "traditions of ancient nations," where "reason" and "common justice" are both latent. In the words of one of his foremost interpreters, B.N. Seal, this culturally pluralist approach to reason took tradition as "embodiments of the collective sense of races of mankind."<sup>30</sup> Rammohun thus concluded that any intellectual method invested in understanding universal human experience should be guided by "lights furnished by both ["reason" and "traditions of ancient nations"]."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 4, 36.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 483-543.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Brajendranath Seal, "Hints on the Study of Raja Rammohun Roy," in *Raja Rammohun Roy* (Kolkata: Banglar Mukh, 2018 [1896]), 17.

<sup>31</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 37.

This orientation of Rammohun found its most powerful expression in his writing against sati or widow-burning. The practice of sati, once prevalent in certain parts of the Indian subcontinent, directed widows to sacrifice themselves on their deceased husbands' funeral pyre. Rammohun's relentless campaign against sati was the source of his fame and notoriety in India. Crucially, in his copious writings on the issue, he steered clear of any invocation of the civilization-barbarism dichotomy.<sup>32</sup> In his heated debate with the traditionalist pandits, Rammohun refused to concede scriptural legitimation of sati. For Rammohun, Sati was at once against "all scriptures and all reason."<sup>33</sup> He gathered evidence in support of the rights of widows and offered alternative explanations of the passages that might appear to support sati. For example, he argued that most compelling evidence in support of sati in *Mitakshara*—a text of Hindu law—characterizes it as a lesser good compared to virtuous living and requires consent on part of the widows. As these provisions had never been respected, widows thus could not possibly have consented to their own immolation.<sup>34</sup> In another instance, Rammohun connects the

---

<sup>32</sup> As Lata Mani rightly pointed out, "the equation of scripture, law and tradition, and the representation of women *as* tradition produced a specific matrix of constraints within which question of sati was debated" (123; original emphasis). Such a re-signification of the problem of "tradition" was constitutive of the late eighteenth-century British institution of colonial rule in India. I would add, however, that Rammohun's approach to the Indian tradition was not the same as Warren Hastings' or William Jones'. He was less interested in reviving the ancient tradition as the authentic source of laws; his aim was rather to show that the Indian tradition is not antithetical to the demand of reason. See Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 119-156.

<sup>33</sup> Rammohun Roy, "Sahamaran Bishaye Prabartak o Nibartaker Dwityiya Sambad," [A Second Conference Between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of Burning Widows Alive] in *Rammohan Rachanabali* (Kolkata: Rammohan Mission, 2008), 231 [Bengali].

<sup>34</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 371.

exclusion of women from their right to property as the debilitating circumstances that had led to the perpetuation of sati.<sup>35</sup>

Rammohun thus did not approach the Indian past as a “lack” of civilization. On the contrary, the “degradation” of the Indian society has to do with its “excess in civilization.”<sup>36</sup> He was not keen on the legal resolution of the problem of sati, specifically because of the charge of external imposition of norms that the supporters of sati were likely to bring against it (though he did support the law when it was instituted in 1829).<sup>37</sup> Rammohun ultimately held that that practices such as sati or exclusion of women from property rights are against “both common sense and the law of the land.”<sup>38</sup> The consolidation of such practices does not have much to do with the absence of enlightened norms in India. It was rather rooted in the wrong interpretation put forward by the Brahmins—the “self-interested guides” who had hidden the “true substance of morality.”<sup>39</sup> Some recent interpreters of Rammohun, such as Andrew Sartori, have taken his critique of “priestly cunning” to be an evidence of his reproduction of a “classic trope” of “British liberalism.”<sup>40</sup> This characterization of Rammohun as a “sincere liberal imperialist” is highly debatable.<sup>41</sup> For James Mill, “priesthood” is a marker of historical backwardness (rather than mere deception) and is “generally found to usurp the greatest authority, in the *lowest* state of

---

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 375-384.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 146. Rammohun shared this argument with eighteenth-century European thinkers such as Montesquieu who viewed contemporary Indian or Chinese civilization as degradation from their early achievements.

<sup>37</sup> Biswas, *Rammohan Samiksha*, 343-345.

<sup>38</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

society.”<sup>42</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, the discourse of “priestcraft” served as the evidence of backwardness also in Macaulay’s developmental narrative of Indian peoplehood. For Rammohun, on the contrary, priestcraft “hid” the source of reason *already* latent in the Indian tradition. It has no bearing on the purported civilizational location of a people. Rammohun himself was clear about his own intellectual continuity with eighteenth-century European enlightenment. In a pseudonymously published essay, he placed himself in company of British and French enlightenment thinkers: “We Hindoos regard him the same light as Christians do Hume, Voltaire, Gibbon and other sceptics.”<sup>43</sup>

But Rammohun had ultimately outgrown his *Tuhfat* phase’s Voltairean denigration of religion. In fact, the aim to reconcile universal reason and plural human societies led him to defend Christianity against its strictly rationalist critics. Rammohun’s exchange with the utopian socialist Robert Owen is suggestive here. Owen took an interest in converting Rammohun to his vision of socialism, and the two met a number of times to discuss politics. Rammohun too appeared to be interested in Owen’s socialism; but he found the latter’s stance on religion to be unacceptable. After multiple conversations, Rammohun decided that he would no longer engage with Owen. The reason for his abstinence was Owen’s rejection of the “Precepts of Christianity.”<sup>44</sup> In a follow-up letter to Owen’s son, Robert Dale, Rammohun revisited the gist of his disagreement with the elder Owen: “It is not necessary either in England or in America to oppose religion in promoting the social domestic and political welfare of their inhabitants particularly a system of religion which inculcates the doctrine of universal love and

---

<sup>42</sup> James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826), 159.

<sup>43</sup> Rammohun, “Ram Doss’s Reply to the Christian,” in *English Works*, 906.

<sup>44</sup> See “Appendix 7,” in Biswas, *Ramamohan-Samiksha*, 621.

charity...more than two thousand years ago wise and pious Brahmans of India entertained almost the same opinion which your father offers though by no means were destitute of religion.”<sup>45</sup>

Owen’s religious views were controversial in his day. Rammohun’s global fame too partly owed to the unitarian excitement over a non-European proponent (Ralph Waldo Emerson characterized him as a rare “trophy” for unitarians).<sup>46</sup> That Rammohun, notwithstanding his earlier denunciation of religion, was not on board with Owen’s critique of religion might seem unsurprising. But the charge becomes more interesting when we take into account that the thinker who so mercilessly satirized the missionary universalization of Christianity was also its defender in the Euro-American context.<sup>47</sup> That was more than a strictly theological issue. As Rammohun’s invocation of the ancient Brahman suggests, the “common basis” across religious traditions operated as a shared ground from which the uneven imperial world could be brought into a commensurable dialogue. The respect for Christianity in Europe was essential to render legible the reason inherent in Indian religious traditions. This is how, then, Rammohun worked out his vision of enlightenment universalism, one that worked as a bedrock for his political turn in the 1820s.

\*\*\*

Rammohun’s clash with the emerging discourse of liberal imperialism took place in the wake of Grant’s Jury Bill in the British Parliament. The Bill would allow Indians to serve on the grand jury (including the trials of Christians) as well as on the Office of the Justice of the Peace.

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 622-23.

<sup>46</sup> On Emerson’s indirect encounter with Rammohun, see Alan D. Hodder, “Emerson, Rammohan Roy, and the Unitarians,” in *Studies in the American Renaissance*, ed. Joel Myerson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1988), 133-148.

<sup>47</sup> For a particularly suggestive example of Rammohun’s critique of the missionaries, see “A Dialogue between a Missionary and Three Chinese Converts,” in *English Works*, 909-913

The right to serve as jurors was central to Rammohun's political activism in the 1820s. Upon his arrival in England, he collaborated with Charles Grant (a member of the Parliament who belonged to the famous Clapham Sect) to amend the current jury act. In support of the Bill, Rammohun offered a lengthy testimony to a Parliamentary Select Committee. The East India Company led the opposition to the Bill. The dispute around the Bill opened up an entire set of arguments concerning whether the "natives" are advanced enough to serve on the jury and in the magistracy. In the pages of *Morning Chronicle*, a proxy encounter took place between Rammohun Roy and James Mill. The *Chronicle's* opposition to the Bill, Rammohun wrote in a letter, had been "stirred up" by James Mill—a friend of the editor, John Black.<sup>48</sup> In one of its editorials, the *Chronicle* made a two-fold argument against opening up the Office of the Justice of the Peace to the "natives." First, it suggested that the system in Britain itself is beleaguered by feudal remnants as well as by less than ideally trained magistrates. Second, the "possession of proper qualifications" for the office in Indians would be nothing short of a "fortunate accident."<sup>49</sup> The two prongs of the argument ultimately united on the question of public "intelligence." With the growing dissemination of legal knowledge and "increased intelligence" in Britain, even unqualified magistrates are forced to take heed of public opinion. Among a backward people

---

<sup>48</sup> Rammohun Roy, "Extracts from a Letter on Grant's Jury Bill," in *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, eds. Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman Part IV (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1947), 40. To my knowledge, this is Rammohun's only documented reference to James Mill.

<sup>49</sup> This argument directly paralleled James Mill's censure of the legal system instituted by the Company in India, especially its reliance on native agents: the codification of law and its application is "one of the most difficult tasks to which the human mind can be applied, a work to which the highest measure of European intelligence is not more than equal, could be expected to be tolerably performed by the unenlightened and perverted intellects of a few Indian pundits." See James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 5 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826), 513.

unacquainted with “English law,” on the other hand, the introduction of native magistrates “would be, of all monstrosities ever conceived, the most monstrous.”<sup>50</sup> The editorial’s approving invocation of the importance of an advanced “stage of civilization” and the questioning of the intellectual qualification of Indians carried the imprints of James Mill’s arguments in the *History of British India*. In fact, the editorial quoted approvingly the rebuttal of the Bill offered by the East India Company’s Court of Directors (a document that might very well have been prepared by James Mill, the spokesman of the Company’s Court of Directors in the period).

Directly following the Board of Directors’ observations, the *Chronicle* presented a long quotation from Charles Grant’s reply to the Directors. Grant affirmed the intellectual capacity of “respectable natives” should not be doubted; in fact, the proof is abundant in the public services for which they are currently eligible. In the original rebuttal to the Company, Grant lifted a number of his arguments directly from Rammohun’s lengthy testimony and the response he drafted against the Court of Directors’ letter.<sup>51</sup> Following Rammohun, Grant found the assumption “gratuitous” that Indians would not make any willing sacrifice to serve voluntarily or would be unable to learn the intricacies of the English law.<sup>52</sup> There is another respect where Rammohun disagreed even more decisively with James Mill and the East India Company. The jury system, he argued, is nothing alien to the Indian tradition: “the principle of juries under certain modifications has from the most remote periods been well understood in this country

---

<sup>50</sup> Untitled editorial, *Morning Chronicle*, p. 2 July 24, 1832.

<sup>51</sup> This also has been underscored by Lynn Zastoupil. See Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 118.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Grant, “Letter from the Right Hon. Charles Grant, MP to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the East India Company,” in *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India: A Selected from Records, 1775-1845*, ed. Jatindra Kumar Majumdar (Calcutta: Art Press, 1941), 381-385

under the name of Punchayet.”<sup>53</sup>The tracing of the jury system in a traditional Indian village council is representative of Rammohun’s overarching aim to unify reason and tradition. His assertion of the “[full] qualification” of “respectable natives” did not simply appeal to their knowledge of English law and language. The expertise of Indians in precolonial legal practices was also significant to Rammohun’s argument, for the principles of justice are ultimately the same. Thanks, in part, to Rammohun’s effort, Grant’s Jury Bill passed into an act in 1832.

Rammohun’s defense of the “common basis” of justice was consistent with his faith in the universal scope of liberty. The two poles of his normative universe were “liberty” and “despotism.” As many of his early interpreters noticed, Rammohun’s political thought bore unmistakable marks of Montesquieu’s theorization of liberty.<sup>54</sup> Along the Montesquieuan line, the question of liberty, for Rammohun, figured as the challenge to institute the separation of powers and maintain “civil rights”. Much of his criticism of the colonial state in the 1820s concerned the despotic potential involved in empowering the British administration in India with legislative and judicial power. Rammohun’s persistent pursuit of trial by jury emerged out of the belief that the “[combination] of Legislative and Judicial power...is destructive of all Civil

---

<sup>53</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 250.

<sup>54</sup> Bimanbehari Majumdar, I think, was correct in his assessment that “the western political philosophers who seem to have influenced the mind of the Raja were not Rousseau and Thomas Paine but Montesquieu, Blackstone and Bentham” (26). Majumdar focuses, in particular, on Montesquieu and Bentham. He attributes Rammohun’s critical distance from the natural rights tradition to Bentham. Given the relative absence of utilitarian influence on Rammohun, it seems more likely that Rammohun’s disinterest in natural rights followed from his enlightenment commitment to cultural humanism. Furthermore, Majumdar correctly treats Bentham as a non-historicist while Rammohun is claimed to be more attentive to the “historical development of a people.” This reading, as I have argued already, suffers from a collapsing of Rammohun into the later developmentalists. On Bentham and Rammohun, see Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*, 26-28.

Liberty.”<sup>55</sup> The concern with the separation of power was also at the forefront of Rammohun’s other political preoccupation: the freedom of the press. His writings in opposition to the 1823 restrictions on vernacular press freedom foregrounded the universal indefensibility of despotic rule, along with the enlightening qualities of free speech. The curtailing of free speech ultimately was a manifestation of the dangers of concentrating of all forms of political power in the administration. Rammohun thus maintained that the restriction on the freedom of the press was a direct result of the executive authority’s assumption of legislative power.<sup>56</sup> As he often argued, the main danger of such a concentration of power was the violation of “civil rights.” On the same ground, Rammohun protested against the transference of the legislative authority in India; he instead preferred the British Parliament exercising the legislative power from the metropole. The same Montesquieuan concerns also informed Rammohun’s scant writings on the political history of ancient India. In Rammohun’s conjectural narrative, the conflict introduced by caste in an “early age of civilization” was only resolved when legislative and executive authority were shared between two separate “tribes.” It is only then India “enjoyed peace and comfort for a great many centuries.” As this arrangement collapsed and one group came to control both executive and legislative authorities, India entered into a millennium of tyranny.<sup>57</sup>

The concern with the separation of powers and the larger question of liberty also informed Rammohun’s controversial position on the colonization of India by European settlers. Rammohun’s support of European settler-colonization had long troubled the project of

---

<sup>55</sup> For a similarly phrased argument in Montesquieu, see *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 157.

<sup>56</sup> Rammohun, “Appeal to the King in Council,” *English Works*, 445.

<sup>57</sup> “Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females,” *English Works*, 375.

assimilating him in a linear narrative of anticolonial political thought.<sup>58</sup> Rammohun's case for colonization was different from the free traders, who had been campaigning for the abolition of the East India Company's monopoly. The free traders held that the opening up of the Indian market would lead to widespread European colonization and help advance India. Rammohun found the prospect of "transplanting a new society" dangerous (to use Edward Wakefield's expression, who was arguably the most important British champion of colonization in the period, though with regard to Australia). For Rammohun, "persons of lower class" would be likely to give in to racial and religious discrimination. He thus only endorsed colonization by "higher and better educated classes of Europeans." Rammohun hoped that a "free and extensive communication" between European settlers and the natives would free the latter's "mind from superstition and prejudices" and improve their knowledge of agriculture and mechanical arts.<sup>59</sup> The force of this otherwise tacit legitimization of civilizing mission concerned the facilitation of reason already present in the natives; but, as I will argue soon, Rammohun began to entertain occasional developmentalist tropes during his final two years in England. Alienating some of his allies invested in prioritizing free trade, Rammohun centralized the question of the separation of powers in this debate on colonization. The European settlers, who would bring their rights with them, would be a guard against the "abuse of power" by the local authority (i.e., the colonial state). The increased intercourse between India and Britain through the settlers, Rammohun hoped, would enable the parliament to legislate more proficiently on Indian issues. Once again, Rammohun underscored the remedy it would offer to help overcome the "mercy of the

---

<sup>58</sup> See, in particular, V.C. Joshi, ed., *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975)

<sup>59</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 317.

representations of a comparatively few individuals.”<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, the “turbulence” likely to follow from European colonization could be preemptively remedied by enacting “equal laws, placing all the classes on the same footing as to civil rights, and the establishment of trial by jury.”<sup>61</sup>

What it further illustrated is that Rammohun was willing to alter the composition of the native population for the sake of civil rights and the separation of power. The pursuit of liberty in an imperial context counter-intuitively presented the prospect of European colonization to be the guard against despotic rule. This certainly was naïve on Rammohun’s part, as, among other things, the violent consequences of increased European presence in India soon demonstrated. What it does help us to see, however, is the relative distance between Rammohun’s politics of liberty and the emerging ideal of self-government. His was a form of politics unperturbed by the source of sovereignty.<sup>62</sup> Much like Montesquieu, Rammohan made no meaningful distinction between sovereignty and government beyond the legislative-executive distinction.<sup>63</sup> He did not respond to the unique challenge of instituting liberty in a global empire—where sovereignty was located in another corner of the world—by questioning imperial sovereignty itself; Rammohun’s vision of good government remained hopeful about instituting the separation of powers and civil rights within the imperial form. This is also precisely why imperial subjection could not stand in

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>62</sup> In a brief piece on the forms of government, Rammohun critiqued both absolute monarchy and (direct) democracy, arguing instead that an aristocracy with a publicly responsive executive body is the ideal political arrangement. Excerpt from *Mirat ul-Akhbar*, *Calcutta Journal*, May 2, 1822.

<sup>63</sup> On Montesquieu’s non-distinction between sovereignty and government, see Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign*, 123-4.

the way of the universal import of liberty. To refer back to the epigraph, Rammohun experienced no temporal lag between the liberty of Neapolitans and his own.

As Rammohun took his politics of liberty to the metropolis, British politics was undergoing its own reckoning with the question of democracy, namely the Reform Act of 1832. This democratic experience paradoxically sowed the seeds of developmentalism in the final phase of Rammohun's thought. He was an enthusiast for the Reform Bill and even vowed to sever connections with England if the Bill failed in Parliament.<sup>64</sup> Grant's Jury Bill was proceeding amid the greater excitement over the Reform Bill. Though Rammohun won the battle over the Jury Bill, the signs of losing the war could already be seen. Rammohun's opponent regarding the Jury Bill, James Mill—the leading light of Philosophical Radicals—was on the same side of the Reform Bill contest. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the rise of liberal imperialism was predicated on a simultaneous normative affirmation of self-government (at home) and the developmentalization of the ideal of self-government in the colonies. In the midst of the dual victories of the Reform and Jury bills, it turned out that the success of the “the mighty people of England” had paradoxically deferred the time of colonial peoplehood. Cautioning against excessive excitement over the passing of the Jury Bill, Rammohun wrote: “The voice of the mighty people of England grows every day stronger in proportion to the growth of their intelligence. I must at the same time confess that the progress we have made in India as to knowledge or politics is by no means equal to that made here by the English. . . . We should not be too hasty and too sanguine in raising our condition, since gradual improvements are most

---

<sup>64</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 925.

durable.”<sup>65</sup> He even directly attributed the rise of popular power in England to its civilizational advancement: “England is now arrived at that degree of civilization which places the reign of opinion on a permanent basis.”<sup>66</sup>

Rammohun passed away soon after, leaving behind a set of unforeseen legacies. He would be hailed variously as the “father of modern India,” the first liberal, and even the real originator of the idea of swaraj. As Partha Chatterjee rightly observed, such recruitments of Rammohun in the “nationalist modern” have elided his distinct historical moment.<sup>67</sup> Rammohun’s political thought, barring the late hesitations, was neither concerned with self-government nor developmentalism. To be clear, much in the vein of eighteenth-century British thought, Rammohun’s work is replete with the term “improvement.” Rammohun did hold that the “object of the Government” was the “improvement of the native population.”<sup>68</sup> The term originated in the seventeenth century and gained widespread currency as a general metaphor for “betterment.”<sup>69</sup> In the history of British political thought, the term can be found in abundance from John Locke to Edmund Burke. In the nineteenth century, improvement became more than a marker of open-ended “betterment;” the collective state of improvement of a people came to be the precondition of liberty and self-government. Rammohun’s political thought predated this turn in nineteenth-century imperial as well as anticolonial thought. His frequent use of the

---

<sup>65</sup> Rammohun Roy, “Extracts from a Letter on Grant’s Jury Bill,” in *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, eds. Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman Part IV (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1947), 39.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>67</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 158.

<sup>68</sup> Rammohun, “A Letter on English Education,” in *English Works*, 474.

<sup>69</sup> For an early history of the idea of improvement, see Paul Warde, “The Idea of Improvement, c. 1520-1700,” in *Custom, Improvement, and the Landscape in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Richard Hoyle (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 127-148.

adjective “liberal” should not either be taken as an evidence of his self-conscious identification with what came to be known as “liberalism.” His uses of liberal “manner” and “principles” primarily referred to the eighteenth-century meaning of enlightened attitude and moderation. A good illustration of this understanding is his account of Ranjit Singh, the contemporaneous Sikh king from western India. Rammohun argued that Singh’s regime was founded on “arbitrary rule” and the “idea of constitutional government [is] entirely foreign to his mind.” And yet he found Singh to be “prudent” and “moderate,” and thus “inclined towards liberal principles.”<sup>70</sup> In the age of self-government, the scholarship on Rammohun Roy struggled to explain the absence of the idea in his work. The editor of his collected works, Jogesh Chunder Ghose, argued that the “germs” of representative government could already be seen in his writings on the judiciary.<sup>71</sup> Others such as Bimanbehari Majumdar conjectured that Rammohun did not make the demand upon his realization that India was not yet fit.<sup>72</sup> These attempts to offer an alibi for Rammohun, however, register the central place the idea of self-government would come to occupy in the narratives of nineteenth-century political thought.

### **Colonial Liberalism and the Developmental Time of Peoplehood**

In May 1881, the Pune-based political journal *Mahratta*—edited, among others, by Bal Gangadhar Tilak—published an article on the political nature of colonial rule in India. It took issue with a certain Sergeant Atkinson who, in a series of recent lectures, had argued that India should be considered a limited monarchy since it was a dependency of Britain. Chastising the Sergeant for only having a superficial understanding of Bentham and Austin, the unsigned

---

<sup>70</sup> Rammohun, *English Works*, 234.

<sup>71</sup> Jogesh Chunder Ghose, “Introduction,” in *English Works*, xxvi.

<sup>72</sup> Majumdar, *History*, 32.

editorial argued, first, that Britain was a republic, as “the sovereignty of England is distributed into the hands of the many.” Crucially, even though England might be a republican polity, the same does not extend to India: “Having shown that the British Government is a republic, we do not at once proceed to say, after the fashion of Mr. Atkinson, that the Government of the Indian Empire is also a republic, because India is a dependency of England.” In other words, no matter how “good” the colonial government is, it could not compensate for the lack of self-government. Furthermore, the form of rule in India was despotic as it was “absolute” and paid no attention to “the will and the wishes of the ruled.” The form of the government of India was thus “republican foreign despotism.”<sup>73</sup>

Two weeks later, the same journal published another editorial on the question of representative government in India. Its conclusion ran thus: “A day will certainly come, however distant it may be, on which the ‘mistress of the ocean’ will confer upon us this grand privilege [representative government]. In the meantime we must pass through many preparatory stages.”<sup>74</sup> This juxtaposition of two seemingly anomalous instances in the same journal— that colonial rule was normatively unjustified was forcefully argued, while imperial tutelage was accepted as a “preparatory” work toward the overcoming of colonialism—was not an isolated instance. A year later, the Bengali novelist and essayist Bankimchandra Chatterjee would publish *Anandamath* (The Abbey of Bliss)—perhaps the most well-known (and controversial) political novel of nineteenth-century India. Situated in the tumultuous period of the 1770s when Muslim rule in Bengal was crumbling and the British were in ascendance, this novel tells the story of a famine-stricken Brahmin who joined a rebellious group called *Santandal* (the party of the children) in

---

<sup>73</sup> “What is the Government of India,” *Mahratta* 1, no. 18 (1881): 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> “Are we Represented in the British Parliament,” *Mahratta* 1, no. 20 (1881): 1.

order to militantly resist Muslim rulers. Although controversial for its unrestrained invocation of the “historical” rivalry between Hindus and Muslims, Bankim’s celebration of the physical resistance to foreign rule would also make this text an acclaimed source for later nationalists. Written in the genre of the romance novel, *Anandamath* narrated an anticlimactic story. When this militant party finally brings Muslim rule to an end, a divine voice intervenes and attempts to dissuade Satyananda, the leader of the group, from fighting the British: “The English are learned in the knowledge of the external world; they are skilled at teaching the public. So we will make them the new ruler of this country.... Until the day Hindus fully acquire knowledge, strength, and qualities for that purpose, the English shall rule over this country.”<sup>75</sup>

Such was the political horizon of late nineteenth-century India, a world steeped in the ubiquity of developmental imagination. The age of Rammohun had receded, as did the framework of “good government.” Indian political thought had come to be dominated by what could broadly be characterized as liberal-imperialist themes. Indeed, as the influence of imperial liberalism dramatically declined in Britain in the 1850s, it acquired a new life among contemporary Indian thinkers.<sup>76</sup> By the 1860s, John Stuart Mill emerged as the most favored British thinker among political thinkers and literati of colonial cities such as Kolkata, Mumbai, and Pune, while Macaulay’s speeches and writings (especially the 1833 Government of India

---

<sup>75</sup> Bankimchandra Chatterjee, *Anandamath* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1983), 189 [Bengali; my translation].

<sup>76</sup> On this point, see Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 263-313; on the decline of imperial liberalism as an imperial ideology, see Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Imperial Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

speech) had also exerted much influence.<sup>77</sup> There was, however, an important difference. The civilizational—and cognitivist—aspects of Victorian developmentalism were thoroughly critiqued by Indian political thinkers. It has rightly been noted that J.S. Mill avoided grounding his theory of historical development on a biological basis; nevertheless, the languages of “civilization” and “mental capacity” continued to mark Mill’s writings until the end of his career.<sup>78</sup> Mill’s contemporaries among Indian liberal thinkers took it upon themselves to de-essentialize the discourse of development.

Perhaps the most iconic moment of this endeavor was Naoroji’s brilliant rebuttal to John Crawfurd, the president of the London Ethnological Society. In February 1866, Crawfurd delivered a paper before the society, titled “On the Physical and Mental Characteristics of the European and Asiatic Races of Man.” The paper engaged in crude ethnological and biological considerations, to prove that the “Asiatic races” are intellectually, morally, and physically much inferior to their European counterparts. Crawfurd concluded by arguing that the difference is ultimately “innate.”<sup>79</sup> In his reply, Naoroji took apart Crawfurd’s rather poorly formulated arguments concerning the intellectual and physical inferiority of the “Asiatic” races, speaking for multiple Asian civilizations all at once. The chief mistake of Crawfurd’s argument, Naoroji claimed, is the assumption that “diversity” of peoples necessarily means an innate hierarchy. And yet Naoroji maintained that while a people like Indians are not innately inferior, they indeed

---

<sup>77</sup> The most comprehensive study of Mill’s reception in nineteenth-century India is, S. Ambirajan, “John Stuart Mill and India,” in *J.S. Mill’s Encounter with India*, eds. Martin I. Moir, Douglas M. Peers, and Lynn Zastoupil (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 221-264.

<sup>78</sup> See Varouxakis, *Mill on Nationality*, 38-52.

<sup>79</sup> John Crawfurd, “On the Physical and Mental Characteristics of the European and Asiatic Races of Man,” in *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol. 5 (London: John Murray, 1867), 81.

are underdeveloped compared to the Europeans. If modern Europeans are developmentally advanced, it is because of their political history, material progress, and advancement in the physical sciences.<sup>80</sup> As he elaborated elsewhere, the nineteenth-century image of modern England often stands as the proof of its essential superiority. The essentialist comparison between India and England does not take into account the different historical fortunes these countries had experienced with the advent of modernity: “It would be almost as fair to compare India in the sixteenth with England in the nineteenth centuries, as it would be to compare the two countries in the first centuries of the Christian era when India was at the top of civilization, and England at the bottom.” The nineteenth century was not the same for India and England; their calendrical contemporaneity belied a historical non-contemporaneity.<sup>81</sup> For Naoroji, Europe’s progress over all those domains is the product of contingent and fortuitous reasons (an argument that echoes Adam Smith), not essentially related to its civilizational quality.

Naoroji’s classic *Poverty and un-British Rule in India*, marshaling formidable statistical evidence, documented the ways in which Britain was draining, as opposed to advancing, India. Rammohun’s faint optimism about the prospect of free trade had given way to an anxiety regarding the depletion of Indian industries in an economically uneven world. In the colonial context, Naoroji argued, free trade practically amounts to a “race between a starving, exhausting invalid, and a strong man with a horse to ride on.” Citing John Stuart Mill’s work on political economy, he argued for the necessity of protectionism for “young colonies.”<sup>82</sup> There was thus an

---

<sup>80</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, “Observations on Mr. Crawford’s Paper on the European and Asiatic Races, read before the Ethnological Society on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1886,” in *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol. 5 (London: John Murray, 1867), 127-150.

<sup>81</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1901), 583.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

“immense difference” between the poor of India and that of western Europe: Indians simply lack productive capacity whereas the European poor “having plenty...suffering from some defect in its distribution.”<sup>83</sup> What is less often emphasized is Naoroji and his colleagues’ development of a parallel account of how economic exploitation was causing the “moral drain” of Indians. The exclusion of Indians from political offices means that their moral faculties—unused and untapped—were in decline. The Europeans in India, Naoroji noted, “acquire India’s money, experience, and wisdom; and when they go, they carry both away with them, leaving India so much poorer in material and moral wealth.”<sup>84</sup>

Crucially, however, the discourse concerning the moral and material drain of the masses did not result in a vindication of the political agency of the people. Much like Alexis de Tocqueville’s account of the *ancien régime*’s portrayal of the misery of the people, the representation of the masses in Naoroji and his colleagues’ writings presupposed the “absence of the people from the political scene.” As Tocqueville observed with regard to the pre-revolutionary administrators who unknowingly laid their own grave: “Because [the people] seemed so impassive, they were deemed to be deaf. When their fate began to arouse interest, others began to speak in front of them as if they were not there.”<sup>85</sup> The Indian liberals, who primarily wrote in English and operated in a transnational imperial realm, had found it easy to assume the absence of masses from their audience. However, while the administrators of the *ancien régime* were yet to encounter the people as a political abstraction, the late nineteenth-century Indian thinkers had no such unfamiliarity with the principle of popular sovereignty. They

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>84</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1901), 203.

<sup>85</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160.

were all too aware of the two bodies of the people, especially French revolutionary aim to “superimpose political abstraction on sociological specificity.”<sup>86</sup> The Indian liberals often contrasted their slow approach to that of the French, as the “disastrous consequence” of the French Revolution lay in giving “self-government” all at once to the French people.<sup>87</sup> The main difference resided in the developmental signification of the social body of the people. To be sure, the figuration of the sovereign people, as the historian David Bell pithily sums up, is inherently paradoxical: “It [revolutionary nationalism] makes political claims which take the nation’s existence wholly for granted, yet it proposes programs which treat the nation as something yet unbuilt.”<sup>88</sup> This dynamic was best captured in Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès’s *What is the Third Estate?*, where he defined the nation (understood as the collective body of the people) as simultaneously given (“the third estate is everything”) and unbuilt (“it has been nothing”). As Sieyès famously argued, the poverty and deprivation of the French masses is exactly what emboldened their political claim to sovereignty.<sup>89</sup> For Indian thinkers, in contrast, the sociological backwardness of the people in an imperial world directly affected—or, in Naoroji’s language, “drained”—the moral-political body of the people. The “unbuilt”—or rather underdeveloped—body of the people disqualified its political authority. Instead of economic exploitation being a violation of given political rights, it only deferred the political becoming of the people. The social question, in other words, had become thoroughly developmentalized.

---

<sup>86</sup> Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, 93.

<sup>87</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal, *Writings and Speeches of Bipin Chandra Pal*, vol. 1, Part 1 (Calcutta: Yugayatri Prakashak Limited, 1954), 14, 19 [1889].

<sup>88</sup> David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism 1680-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>89</sup> See, Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* In *Political Writings*, ed. Michael Sonenscher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 94–144

The lack of unity among the Indian masses also came to be signified as a developmental problem. Surendranath Banerjea wondered if the hope for an “intellectual, moral, and social union of the Indian peoples” has been the “phantom of an excited imagination.”<sup>90</sup> After all, the diverse masses of India appear to be “separated...by everything that constitutes the distinctive difference between races and peoples.”<sup>91</sup> Considering the contrasting cases of Swiss, Italian, and German nationhood, Banerjea found no essential linguistic or ethnic criteria for national unity. Compared to its ancient past, modern India was claimed to be particularly well poised for the sentiment of political “brotherhood” across its diverse constituencies. The “mighty potency” of a “great revolution” ushered in by the British was transforming the Indian society. The introduction of English education has brought the “educated classes” from across India close to each other, while railways have helped eliminate “the prejudices which had separated [Indians] for ages.”<sup>92</sup> Banerjea thus concluded that the mission of British rule in India is to “save, regenerate, emancipate from the chains of ignorance, error, and superstition... 150 millions of human beings... to reconcile the jarring conflicts of diverse Indian nationalities, to bring them together... into a compact and homogeneous mass.”<sup>93</sup> The questions of caste and religious conflict turned out to be vestiges of the past, to be developmentally transcended rather than immanently addressed.

For all their trenchant critique of colonial policy and administration, the Indian liberals did not abandon, but rather clung onto the promise of development. As the hope for economic development unraveled, the political promise of developmentalism appeared to be all the more

---

<sup>90</sup> Surendranath Banerjea, *Speeches of Surendranath Banerjea*, Vol. 1 (Kolkata: Indian Association, 1970), 37.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-7.

indispensable. As Naoroji noted in 1867, the long experience of “despotic” rule had left India a “degraded nation”: the “mass of the people,” lacking the “political aid which is so vital to the growth and welfare of any nation,” were in a static state.<sup>94</sup> Insofar as the lack of Indian peoplehood was a result of the long history of subjection, Naoroji argued, its resolution too should take place slowly, through a process of gradual reform. Having painstakingly showed how colonialism was draining India, Naoroji credited “English rule” with “[pouring] new light...upon us, turning us from darkness into light and teaching us the new lesson that kings are made for the people, not peoples for their kings.”<sup>95</sup> Colonial rule was thus *also* a “blessing.” The British had simultaneously impoverished India and gifted it a new, though ever elusive, political ideal: self-government. Still, the work of self-government was primarily promissory. When Surendranath Banerjea declared in his presidential speech at the 1895 Congress Session that “[no] responsible Congressman had ever asked for representative institutions...for the masses of our people,” he was articulating a position largely taken for granted by late nineteenth-century Congress politicians.<sup>96</sup> For Naoroji as for Banerjea, the best means to improve the body of the people lay in politically empowering its “advanced” section—the educated classes. Accordingly, the question of self-government primarily entailed the demands of Indian integration into the colonial administration and occasional, muted claims for limited legislative representation.

There were broadly two related avenues of authorization that early Congress thinkers pursued in their attempts to legitimize the demand for limited self-government. The first strategy

---

<sup>94</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, *Dadabhai, Essays, Speeches, and Writings on Indian Politics* (Bombay: Caxton Printing Works, 1887), 26.

<sup>95</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, *Selected Speeches and Writings of Dadabhai Naoroji* (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., 1917), 4.

<sup>96</sup> Surendranath Banerjea, *Speeches and Writings of Hon. Surendranath Banerjea* (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co. Banerjea 1917), 12-13.

was to claim that Indians should be counted as citizens of the British Empire, which, in turn, would endow them with political rights. To ground this claim, Naoroji, in particular, invoked the authority of the pledges that the Company and the Queen had made over the century. However, the pledges, such as the proclamation of 1858, had no specific provision about self-government. Naoroji's attempt to interpret the recognition of Indians as British citizens was further debilitated by the general exclusion of non-white colonies such as India from the contemporaneous project of "Greater Britain."<sup>97</sup> The second—and more consequential—justificatory strategy was to link political participation and representation with the urgency of development. Underscoring the link between material and moral development, Naoroji suggested Indian participation in the government, however limited, was the right answer to the problem of underdevelopment.

A highly selective reading of John Stuart Mill proved to be central to this argument. R.C. Dutt perhaps best exemplifies this late nineteenth-century Indian appropriation of Mill. Much like Naoroji, Dutt found the "drain [of] the resources" and "poverty of the voiceless millions" to be directly related to the "non-representation" of Indian views in the administration of the country. To shore up such arguments, Dutt would often summon the authority of Mill. Consider this quote from Mill's *Considerations* that Dutt referred to after relating Indian underdevelopment to its non-representation: "It is an inherent condition of human affairs that no intention, however sincere, of protecting the interest of others, can make it safe or salutary to tie up their own hands."<sup>98</sup> The development over the last few decades, argues Dutt, proves Mill's point and makes it imperative that "some form of representation such as it is safe and wise and

---

<sup>97</sup> On the exclusion of non-white colonies from the projects of Greater Britain, see Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>98</sup> R.C. Dutt, *England and India: A Record of Progress During a Hundred Years 1785-1885* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1897), x.

practicable” should be given to India. Mill’s colonial exception received no acknowledgment. In the Introduction to his acclaimed *Economic History of India*, Dutt cited Mill’s arguments against the parliamentary rule of British people over India (which, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, came up in the context of Mill’s support of rule by the Company). Ignoring Mill’s conclusion while invoking his authority, Dutt directed Mill’s argument against parliamentary rule over India to bolster the case for Indian representation. Similar justifications of limited Indian representation were ubiquitous in the works of Surendranath Banerjea, Naoroji and others—with or without citing Mill.

The appropriation of Mill against the grain of his argument had an important consequence. Mill suspended colonial sovereignty while assigning the developmental responsibility to the British-led government. His account thus deferred both sovereign peoplehood and self-government of the “backward” colonies. In contrast, the Indian liberals posited self-government as the path toward the development of the people into a “fit” sovereign. This developmental justification of self-government pitted the liberals against the colonial government and increased their investment in the promise of imperial sovereignty. But where exactly was imperial sovereignty to be found? Naoroji, as I noted above, often sought to locate the source of imperial sovereignty in the promises made by the queen and other officials. Yet he also argued that imperial sovereignty ultimately rests in the “hands of the Indian authorities *in England*” who are under parliamentary control.<sup>99</sup> As a result, the responsibility for India resides with “the English people”: “One elector in England has more voice in the government of his country than the whole of the Indian people... We appeal to you to exercise your power in

---

<sup>99</sup> Naoroji, *Poverty*, 206 (original emphasis).

making your Government carry out its solemn pledges.”<sup>100</sup> The responsibility of the English people was also a matter of conscience, because they too were once in the same historical stage as Indians.<sup>101</sup> The political project of the liberals was thus to directly engage the British people in order to embolden the case of (limited) Indian self-government.<sup>102</sup> This, of course, was directly against Mill’s impassioned defense of non-parliamentary rule over India in the final chapter of the *Considerations*.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the faith in the efficacy of “petitioning” and “constitutional agitation” in England was inseparable from the faith in the remote English people.<sup>104</sup> As the sovereign people was located in another corner of the world, the Indian liberals decided to take their appeal directly to England, bypassing the colonial government itself. Accordingly, Naoroji ran for the British Parliament, succeeding in his second attempt in 1892.

Let us consider a representative nineteenth-century response to a classic liberal issue (freedom of speech) to illustrate this point further. In 1878, the colonial government passed an act curtailing vernacular presses’ freedom to criticize British policies. Surendranath Banerjea’s response to the act—delivered in front of a large gathering in Kolkata—laid bare the structure of colonial-liberal political authorization. Banerjea began the speech disputing the evidence presented as the proof of vernacular disloyalty. He then supplied the audience with a number of quotations from high British authorities, seeking to affirm the loyalty of Indian subjects.

Interestingly, in contrast to Rammohun, whether the freedom of the press is a universal value or

---

<sup>100</sup> Naoroji, *Speeches*, 251-2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> See Mithi Mukherjee, *India in the Shadow of Empire: A Legal and Political History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010) for a reading of Indian political thought that emphasizes the failure of Naoroji and his colleagues to break free of imperial sovereignty.

<sup>103</sup> Though it is not clear if Naoroji was aware of Mill’s argument against involving English people in the administration of India (especially in the final chapter of the *Considerations*).

<sup>104</sup> See Naoroji, *Speeches and Writings*, 83-96.

not had no traction for Banerjea. The “question,” he argues, “is not whether a certain number of Indians should have the right of free speech.” It is rather an “essentially English question.”<sup>105</sup> For Banerjea, the gravity of the question ultimately resides in whether this act—which is “against the instinct of Englishmen”—should be enacted “in any part of the world acknowledging British rule.” The political duty of Indians, then, “is to appeal to the representatives of England” and to Englishmen’s instinct of freedom.<sup>106</sup> “It is in the best interest of the millions of this country,” Banerjea argued in a follow-up speech, “[to devise] means to educate English opinion on Indian questions.” Given the absence of such a mission thus far, Banerjea concluded that Indians have “absolutely done nothing” [sic] to advance themselves.<sup>107</sup> The resolution of the meeting thus turned out to be petitioning the British parliament. This is how, then, the hierarchy of peoples manifested itself in the precarious business that was politics under colonial rule.

Early commentators on late nineteenth-century Indian political thought had already underscored the colonial-liberal turn to the “English people.” Bimanbehari Majumdar, who was perhaps the first historian to theorize “the liberal school of political thought” of nineteenth-century India, argued that one of the distinctive features of the liberal school was their investment in “systematic propaganda in England.”<sup>108</sup> In a relatively recent study, Theodore Koditschek describes this form of political claim-making as strategic “calculations by trailblazing nationalists who recognized that the highest hope for Indian unity and independence lay in cultivating the British connection.”<sup>109</sup> This strategic “calculation,” however, would have

---

<sup>105</sup> Surendranath Banerjea, “The Vernacular Press Act,” in *Speeches and Writings of Babu Surendranath Banerjea, 1876-1880* (Calcutta: Bose Press, 1880), 108.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>107</sup> Banerjea, “The Vernacular Press Act—Second Meeting,” 114.

<sup>108</sup> Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*, 98.

<sup>109</sup> Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination*, 291.

significance consequence for the anticolonial democratic project. By the end of the nineteenth century, Indian liberals had helped consolidate a picture of the people whose socio-economic exploitation redoubled as political incapacity. Their hope to temporarily separate the political abstraction of popular sovereignty from the immiserated social body of the people turned out to be a dangerous bargain. The normative pull of popular sovereignty turned them away from the people that was not yet and to the people that already was, i.e., the British people. The affirmation of sovereignty of the metropolitan people in the present for the sake of the future colonial people resulted in a stark display of the hierarchy of popular authorities. In the process, self-government transformed into an idea historically prior popular sovereignty. It came to be seen as a historical bridge that would ultimately generate the popular authority itself. As we shall see in the following chapters, the consequences of this theoretical development for the anticolonial democratic project were to be significant.

The rise of the discourse of self-government fundamentally transformed the normative horizon of Indian political thought in the second half of the nineteenth century. In contrast to Rammohun's pre-democratic liberalism, Banerjea or Naoroji's project was not simply "good government." The framework of self-government had replaced the concerns with the separation of powers and the liberty of subjects with that of the development of the people. Empire too had become a problem: for all their tributes to the imperial promise, the late nineteenth-century liberals had never ceased to mention that the only legitimate form of government is a popular one. And yet the project of sovereignty through self-government had ended up consolidating the deferral of colonial peoplehood. From the final decade of the nineteenth century, the main critique of the generation of Banerjea and Naoroji would precisely be enactment of imperial hierarchy in the process of agitating for self-government. What the liberals characterized as

“constitutional agitation” would be called “mendicancy” and “begging” by their Swadeshi critics. As Aurobindo Ghose—who first articulated a critique of the Congress on this ground in the 1890s (*New Lamps for the Old*)—would write at the height of Swadeshi Movement: “The very basis of constitutional agitation is a reliance on the foreigner and a habit of appealing to him, which is the reverse side of a distrust and certain contempt for their own people.”<sup>110</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Posthumous Formation of Colonial Liberalism**

While reminiscing about the Amritsar Massacre and its aftermath, Jawaharlal Nehru noted, with a tinge of amusement, that the “moderates” had begun to “call” themselves “Liberals.”<sup>111</sup> In the next few pages of *Toward Freedom*, Nehru would alternate between “moderates” and “liberals,” ultimately settling with the latter. Nehru was referring to the founding of the “National Liberal Federation of India” in 1920. The need for a separate political organization for the “liberals” emerged out of their unease with the label “moderate.” The president of the its second session, Sir P.S. Sivaswamy Aiyer, suggested that they adopt either “Liberal” or “Progressive” as the name of the new political organization.<sup>112</sup> The conceptual intimacy between these two terms, as we have seen, was important to the global history of liberal imperialism. In the historiography of colonial India, the term “moderates” would ultimately carry the day. For a brief period, the rebranding of moderatism generated a flurry of reflections on the history of liberalism in India.

---

<sup>110</sup> Aurobindo Ghose, “The Effect of Petitionary Politics,” in *Bande Mataram* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2002), 459.

<sup>111</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: John Day Company, 1941), 51.

<sup>112</sup> *Report of the Proceedings of the second session of the All India Conference of the Moderate Party held at the Town Hall, Calcutta on the 30th and 31st December, 1919 and 1st January, 1920* (Calcutta: 1920), 22.

One of the first book-length studies of the history of Indian liberalism was Maganlal Buch's *The Rise and Growth of Indian Liberalism* (1938), based on his University of London dissertation. The book was not so much a history of, but rather a history for the Liberal Federation.<sup>113</sup> Buch traced the slow but steady growth of the "liberal spirit" over all aspects of Indian life: religious, social, economic, and political. Buch's definition of liberalism was straightforward: "the ideal of gradual attainment of fuller and fuller freedom."<sup>114</sup> Like almost all colonial reflections on liberalism and empire, Buch's text was ultimately a faithful meditation on the progressive nature of political time. Invariably, the distinction between Indian Liberals and their political others was drawn in terms of temporal markers: "patient" vs. "impatient," "forward-looking" vs. "past-looking," and so on. The search for the prehistory of the Liberals — or the moderates—would lead Buch to enlist Rammohun Roy as the beginning point of the march of progress in India (and, by extension, that of Indian liberalism).<sup>115</sup> Buch's narrative gave us a taste of the future—though Rammohun's rebirth as the apostle of liberalism was yet to be set in motion. A few years later, J.V. Naik published a history of the Liberal Federation on the occasion of its silver jubilee. The volume was written amid the unraveling of the British Empire and the political irrelevance of the flailing Liberal Federation. It turned out to be a celebration of

---

<sup>113</sup> Consider, for example, this passage from Buch's *Liberalism*: "The essential mission of the Indian Liberal Party was to translate the great social and political ideas for which the Western Government in its highest conception stood into the lives and thoughts, first, of the educated people of India and the, through them, of the masses. These ideals saw they saw in the march of, first, English and, then, European and American history." Maganlal Buch, *The Rise and Growth of Indian Liberalism* (Baroda: Atmaram Press, 1938), 313.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>115</sup> It was, and still is, common to begin the narration of all things modern with Rammohan Roy. Bipin Chandra Pal, on the extremist side, would attribute the origin of the idea of swaraj to Roy. See Bipin Chandra Pal, *The Brahma Samaj and the Battle for Swaraj in India* (Kolkata: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1945).

the “animated moderation” of Indian liberalism. Naik’s narrative too started with Rammohun, whom he presented as a moderate thinker—a proponent of “regulated liberty.” Naik, however, acknowledged that Rammohun, at best, is a precursor of liberalism proper, for he wrote “before the dawn of liberalism in Europe and before its rise in the mid-Victorian period of English history.”<sup>116</sup>

The political meaning of liberalism in colonial India had been inseparable from the investment of hope in the British Liberal Party. In nineteenth-century Britain, the meaning of liberalism was profoundly shaped by the experience of the Reform Acts. As James Fitzjames Stephen aptly summarized it: ““liberal” and “liberalism” are rather proper names than significant words, and denote in politics...the party which wishes to alter existing institutions with the view of increasing popular power.” “In short,” Stephen elaborated, “they are not greatly remote in meaning from the words “democracy” and “democratic.”” If liberalism was to fare better than democracy, it would need to restrain the popular power that it helped to politically integrate.<sup>117</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the older references of the term to moderation and liberty co-existed with the more precise political reference to parliamentary reform.<sup>118</sup> Though affiliated

---

<sup>116</sup> J.V. Naik, *Indian Liberalism: A Study, 1918-1943* (Bombay: Padma Publications, 1945), 1.

<sup>117</sup> James Fitzjames Stephen, “Liberalism,” *Cornhill Magazine*, 5 (Jan. 1862): 70–83.

<sup>118</sup> The semantic history of liberalism as a political term only began meaningfully from the early nineteenth century. In Britain, the term existed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a reference to the “social qualities of an educated gentleman.” In a fine work of conceptual history, Jörn Leonhard found that the new political meaning of liberalism emerged from Britain’s growing encounters with the political development in Continental Europe. Nevertheless, the Whig-Tory distinction initially mapped onto the uses of liberalism. The early uses of “liberalism” in Britain emphasized its Whiggish emphasis on “universal liberty.” The new meaning that the term acquired in Continental Europe—namely, opposition to despotic monarchy and commitment to constitutional government—did not quite enter into its British uses. As Leonhard notes, the early reference to continental liberalism would often be in the original Spanish or French word, thus showing resistance to the generalization of its Continental meaning. When the term acquired a

with the British Liberal Party, Stephen was no liberal imperialist in the mold of John Stuart Mill; he had no illusion regarding the non-liberal roots of British imperial rule. When Stephen came out against the Ilbert Bill of 1883 (which would have allowed Indian judges to preside over the trials of British citizens), K.T. Telang, who would later be hailed as a founder of Indian liberalism, offered a scathing rejoinder while addressing Stephen's illiberalism:

“[Stephen is] in obtrusive antagonism to the doctrines of modern liberalism, by which I do not mean what is called by that name in the jargon of English party politics, but I mean liberalism in the broader and higher sense, as signifying those political principles, which, for us here in India, are embodied in the great Proclamation of 1858.”<sup>119</sup>

For Telang, the promise of liberal imperialism—which for late nineteenth-century Indian thinkers was encapsulated in the Queen's Proclamation—had no transparent relationship to domestic liberalism in Britain. Telang thus suggested that the higher meaning of liberalism is to be found in imperial conduct rather than in strictly domestic issues. The critics of late nineteenth-century Indian liberals would be even quicker to question the faith in British liberalism. Bal Gangadhar Tilak's speech “The Tenet of the New Party,” delivered at the height of the Congress' moderate-extremist divide in 1907, is suggestive. While fiercely questioning Gokhale's faith in the British Empire, Tilak singled out the moderates' enthusiasm about the “revival of

---

consistent character in British political life in the late 1820s, it referred not so much to the idea of republican government but rather to the political groups committed to gradual parliamentary reform. This is precisely the semantic shift that would enable uses of the adjective “liberal” to refer to the Tories open to reform in the period leading up to the Reform Act of 1832. The re-signification of the old Whig-Tory polarity in terms of the liberal-conservative distinction would partly settle the partisan affiliation of the term, even as the older social and temperamental connotations of the adjective “liberal” survived. See, Jörn Leonhard, “From European Liberalism to the Languages of Liberalisms: The Semantics of Liberalism in European Comparison,” *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* vol. 8 (2004): 17-51.

<sup>119</sup> K.T. Telang, “The Ilbert Bill Question,” in *Selected Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: K.R. Mitra, 1916), 194

Liberalism” in Britain. The mapping of the political divide in England, Tilak argued, does not replicate itself in India: “A Liberal Government means that the Government or the members of the Government are imbued with Liberal principles because they want to have the administration of their country conducted on those principles. They are Liberals in England, but I have seen Liberals in England come out to India to get into conservative ways.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, liberalism as a political principle does not quite travel across the colonial space.

The Cold War construction of liberalism as an ideological counterpart to capitalist exchange relations would also make its entrance into the intellectual history of India. Ranajit Guha’s 1974 essay—“Neel-Darpan: The Image of a Peasant Revolt in a Liberal Mirror”—is perhaps one of the earliest academic works on nineteenth-century India that implied that the logic of capitalist class relations is built into the political idea of liberalism. At once a “liberal” and a “petty bourgeois,” Dinabandhu Mitra—the author of *Neel Darpan*—appeared to Guha as a paradigmatic liberal who “stands close to the power of the state seeking cover behind the law and the bureaucracy.”<sup>121</sup> Guha is careful enough to analytically distinguish “liberalism” as a political idea from the larger class analysis that undergirded his argument. Thus, even though the conceptual and economic dimensions of liberalism became closely linked, Guha’s account of colonial liberalism as a mirror for “imperial loyalty” was very much in continuity with the Swadeshi critique of liberalism. Other historians of nineteenth-century India also found the

---

<sup>120</sup> Bal Gangadhar Tilak, “Tenets of the New Party,” in *Speeches and Writings of Bal Gangadhar Tilak* (Madras: Ganesh & co., 1919), 57-8.

<sup>121</sup> Ranajit Guha, “Neel-Darpan: The Image of a Peasant Revolt in a Liberal Mirror,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 2, no.1 (1974): 43.

colonial liberal archive to be stuck in the distinct predicament of a “bourgeois-liberal” ideology without the attendant social transformation.<sup>122</sup>

Just as the post-War Euro-American debate over liberalism began to wane, “liberalism” made its proverbially belated entrance into the scholarship of the colonial world. This turn to liberalism was triggered by the correction of a major gap in twentieth-century liberalism scholarship: the deep entanglement between nineteenth-century liberalism and imperialism.<sup>123</sup> Though the unpacking of the conceptual imbrication between liberalism and empire has been the main preoccupation of the scholars of imperial liberalism, the centering of liberalism in the imperial history offered a different set of interpretative possibilities for the scholars of colonial liberalism. The Indian liberals’ critical exchange with their European counterparts could now be understood in its contemporary global-imperial context, as opposed to the benchmark of twentieth century anticolonialism. The colonial-liberal attempt to carve out a non-European space for “constitutional liberalism” could be seen as innovative, thus facilitating the contention that theirs was a “liberalism much more than a discourse masking the exercise of social and political power.”<sup>124</sup>

The changing fortune of colonial liberalism veered from an older discourse of historical lack (vis-à-vis the established anticolonial democratic norms) to the more globally sensitive approach that has rightly sought to transcend the limits of the “ideology-critique.” My goal in this chapter has been to critically examine the very criteria through which the global scope of nineteenth-century Indian political thought has been understood. The global reach of

---

<sup>122</sup> See Sumit Sarkar, “Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past,” in *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, ed. V.C. Joshi (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975), 46-68.

<sup>123</sup> See, Pitts, *A Turn to Empire* (2005); Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (1999).

<sup>124</sup> Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 1.

Rammohun's enlightenment politics of liberty was primarily non-developmental, relying as it did on a humanist notion of universal reason. The developmental integration of the globe, and the concomitant resignification of self-government as a historically dependent ideal, presented a different challenge to the generations of Naoroji and Banerjea. The standard grouping of Rammohun and late nineteenth-century thinkers under the rubric of liberalism thus tends to miss the emergence of the democratic ideal in the wake of the developmental turn.<sup>125</sup> By and large, early Congress thinkers enthusiastically theorized the progressive vision of a democratic future and even accepted the violence of the empire as an unavoidable part of the progressive journey: "It has been remarked by Tennyson, somewhere in his poems, that the path of human progress is streaked with blood, and the car of human civilization rolls forward amid the corpses of men, women, and children. This remark seems to me to be pregnant with truth...[England] has a glorious mission to fulfill here, a mission far nobler than it ever fell to the lot of Greek, Macedonian, or Roman to accomplish."<sup>126</sup> The political end of the progressive journey, Banerjea added later, was to be a state of "popular domination."<sup>127</sup> The dogged pursuit of progress lends itself easily to the impoverishment of the present. In Banerjea's case, it also demanded a move away from the people that he one day hoped to see "enthroned."

---

<sup>125</sup> The attempts to articulate the discontinuity between the two halves of the nineteenth century have compounded the problem further. For example, Andrew Sartori's distinguishing of Rammohun's "cosmopolitan liberalism" to "indigenist nationalism" of his successors elides, at once, the eighteenth-century roots of Rammohun's politics of liberty and the developmental grappling with self-government of the latter. See, Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 68-108, 136-175.

<sup>126</sup> Banerjea, *Speeches of Surendranath Banerjea*, 33, 36.

<sup>127</sup> Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making: Being the Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 67

With Macaulay, the younger Mill, and others, liberalism came to designate a set of conceptual arrangements between sovereignty, government, and peoplehood. The project of “increasing popular power” domestically would be conceptually wired together with a developmental vision of global peoplehood. Against this backdrop, the Indian liberals questioned the discourse of civilization and worked out a non-essentialist framework of historical development. Responding to the liberal-imperialist subsumption of democracy in a global vision of development, they creatively contested the imperial claim to rule on the ground of incomplete colonial sovereignty. As I have showed, what the Indian liberals challenged is not the premise of underdeveloped peoplehood but rather the argument that underdevelopment should amount to an exclusion from the government. It is this deeper, developmental conception of popular sovereignty that led the colonial liberals to restage the hierarchy of peoplehood in the course of their pursuit of self-government.

The first decade of the twentieth century would usher in a new era with the outbreak of colonial India’s first, if tentative, mass anticolonial movement. In the wake of the Swadeshi Movement, the precarious politics of waiting for the people would encounter intense criticism from a new group of political thinkers in and around the Congress. Ironically, the declaration of the demand for immediate self-government came from none other than Dadabhai Naoroji, the old guard of nineteenth-century liberals. Nevertheless, the nineteenth-century tradition of colonial liberalism rapidly went into obsolescence in the early twentieth century. The new group of anticolonial thinkers—organized around their shared rejection of appealing to the British people—would face their own struggle in conceptualizing a sovereign people. Their dramatic rise, though historically influential, would only last briefly. Out of the ruins of nineteenth-century anticolonial thought would emerge colonial India’s most formidable critic of

developmentalism: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It is to this story that the dissertation now turns.

## Chapter 3

### **The Colonial Paradox of Peoplehood: Swaraj and the Gandhian Moment**

#### **Introduction**

In his presidential speech at the Calcutta Congress Session of 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji—at the twilight of a half-a-century-long political career—deployed the word “swaraj” in passing to describe the demand for immediate self-government: “We do not ask any favors... Instead of going into any further divisions or details of our rights as British citizens, the whole matter can be comprised in one word —“self-government” or *swaraj* like that of the United Kingdom or the Colonies.”<sup>1</sup> The “Grand Old Man of India” Naoroji, delivered the speech at the height of the Swadeshi movement, an event that inaugurated the era of mass protests and raised new questions about the terms of anticolonial politics in colonial India. For much of the speech, Naoroji painstakingly elaborated on the institutional nature of his rather minimalistic, and already familiar, account of Indian self-government. Still, his public disavowal of the temporal order of anticolonial politics (what he characterized as the necessity to wait “till all the people [were] ready” for self-government) sent seismic waves through the bustling political scene of colonial India<sup>2</sup>. An intense interpretative debate soon broke out over the meaning and political implications of the “dubious word” swaraj, ultimately leading to the splitting of the Congress in 1907.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, “Calcutta Congress Presidential Address,” in *Speeches and Writings of Dadabhai Naoroji* (Madras: G.A. Nathesen & Co., 1917), 73.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>3</sup> A.C. Mazumdar, *The Indian National Evolution: A Study of the Origin and Growth of the Indian National Congress* (New Delhi: Michiko & Panthajan, 1915), 89.

The Kolkata-based weekly *The Bengalee*—edited by Surendranath Banerjea, a leader of the moderate wing of the party—lauded Naoroji’s deployment of the term, saying that it “[h]as a fullness of meaning, a reality about it, which is denied to words drawn from an alien language.”<sup>4</sup> At the opposite, so-called “extremist,” spectrum of Congress politics, Aurobindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal’s *Bande Mataram*, despite its consistent criticism of Congress moderates including Naoroji, found the coinage of “swaraj” to be the product of “an inspired moment” (Ghose 1957 [1907], 40).<sup>5</sup> Against *The Bengalee*’s contention that the term was “discovered” by Naoroji, the London-based expatriate outlet *Indian Sociologist* wryly pointed out that two regional periodicals bearing the name *Hind Swarajya* were in circulation much before the presidential address, and one of them had in fact been involved in a well-publicized sedition case in the recent past. The author of this brief article, Shyamji Krishnavarma, explained the meaning of the term in an assured matter-of-fact manner: “The word “Swaraj ... is the Sanskrit equivalent for Home Rule... the Latin word *suum regnum* being literally in Sanskrit *svarajyam*, i.e., one’s own rule—home rule.”<sup>6</sup> As the unfolding debate over the meaning of swaraj would soon demonstrate, such confident definitions of swaraj opened up more questions than answers.

In rejecting the deferral of self-government, Indian anticolonial thinkers found themselves faced with the prior question regarding the “swa” (self) of swaraj: the figure of the colonized people. The idea that native societies are backward in time and must be developed under the tutelage of the colonial state before the institution of self-government defined the

---

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Shyamji Krishnavarma, “Home Rule is ‘SVARAJYA,’” *Indian Sociologist* 3, no. 3 (March 1907), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Aurobindo Ghose, “The Results of the Congress” in *Bande Mataram: Political Writings and Speeches* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2002), 208. [December 31, 1906]

<sup>6</sup> *IS* 3.3, 11.

institutional and ideological career of British rule in nineteenth-century India<sup>7</sup>. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the figure of the colonized people came to descriptively embody the historical backwardness ascribed to the colonies. Normatively, the perceived inadequacy of colonial peoplehood helped legitimate the suspension of Indian sovereignty. By the mid-nineteenth century, the promise of transforming the colonial masses into the people emerged as the main British claim to legitimacy in India. What “one’s own rule” meant, however, would prove to be a rather difficult question to settle. Does it simply mean Indian representation under imperial sovereignty? On the other hand, if it is an outright call for independence, how could the people—i.e., the “self” of self-rule—rule without any prior democratic training? The concept of swaraj would thus quickly become absorbed in questions of foundational political-theoretic import: what constituted the peoplehood of the colonized and what would their *own* rule mean? It is against this backdrop that a group of anticolonial political thinkers—Dadabhai Naoroji, Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and M.K. Gandhi, among others—would strive to theorize self-rule for India amid the developmental deferral of colonial peoplehood.

This chapter serves two purposes. The first, and more general aim of this chapter is to theoretically examine the problem of peoplehood under colonialism. Engaging with an underappreciated body of pre-Gandhian political thought, the first section traces how early swaraj theorists struggled to posit a sovereign people that could authorize the founding of self-rule. Insofar as the people were taken to be the object of development and, thus, were yet to become *the* people, they could not simultaneously be summoned as the authorizing power

---

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Eric Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

underlying the claim to self-rule. Conversely, the act of appealing to empire for self-rule immediately undermined the very abstraction of sovereign peoplehood that was posited as the ultimate goal. Reckoning with the conflicted history of modern popular sovereignty, democratic theorists have stressed the point that the problem of authorization is ultimately rooted in the essential contestability of the concept of the people.<sup>8</sup> As Jason Frank argues, claims to speak in the name of the people—whether by underauthorized groups or by instituted authorities — are always marked by “never fully realized reference to the sovereign people.”<sup>9</sup> The project of anticolonial founding, too, grappled with a dilemma of authorization; the colonial dilemma followed not so much from the contesting claims of being authorized by the people, but rather from the paradigmatic presupposition that the people—because of their developmental lack—had not yet become *claimable*. What Naoroji’s declaration of Indian self-government immediately disclosed is a distinctly colonial predicament: a government of Indians that could not be authorized in the name of the people themselves. Registering the split between Indian government and British sovereignty, Naoroji conceded that leaving sovereign authority vested in the British people was a necessary condition for attaining self-government. On the other hand, as Tilak and Pal illustrate, the turn to the “underdeveloped” —and unclaimable—figure of the people unwittingly reinforced a further deferral of the arrival of self-rule proper. This is precisely the paradox that would shape the struggle to found swaraj. Instead of approaching anticolonial founding as a search for unity on pre- or extra-colonial grounds such as land, religion, and

---

<sup>8</sup> Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Post-Revolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4-39; Angélica Bernal, *Beyond Origins: Rethinking Founding in a Time of Constitutional Democracy* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5-15.

<sup>9</sup> Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 3.

culture,<sup>10</sup> I thus locate the problem squarely in the dilemmas intrinsic to the developmentalist figuration of colonial peoplehood.

The concept of swaraj is now most famously associated with M.K. Gandhi who led the Indian anticolonial movement in its name and whose influential text *Hind Swaraj* bears the term in its title. This Gandhian account of swaraj is generally contrasted with the instrumentalist approach of his predecessors in the anticolonial movement.<sup>11</sup> However, such a framing of Gandhi's concept of swaraj both obscures the central theoretical tension that constituted its pre-Gandhian career and elides the theoretical innovation underlying Gandhi's reinvention of the concept. Recovering his disputes with the developmental—as well as instrumental—visions of self-rule in *Hind Swaraj*, this chapter offers a reinterpretation of the political import of Gandhi's ethical turn to the self. Gandhi's theory of action has been interpreted as an “escape” from or “an indifference” to politics.<sup>12</sup> Though it is evident that Gandhi largely avoided the institutional terms of modern politics, I suggest that his rejection of the developmental ideals of collective peoplehood—political fitness and unity, in particular—offered an innovative answer to the crisis of popular authorization that plagued early twentieth-century colonial Indian politics. The

---

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Kohn and Keally McBride, *Political Theories of Decolonization: Postcolonialism and the Problem of Foundations* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-13.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Dallmayr, “What is Swaraj? Lessons from Gandhi,” in *Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (NY: Lexington Books, 2000), 105; Raghavan N. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 347; Anthony J. Parel, “Editor's Introduction,” in *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), xxx.

<sup>12</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 110. Uday Mehta, “Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life,” *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 371; Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 203-5.

Gandhian recasting of the concept of swaraj displaced the mantle of authorization from the collective to the self, emphasizing the immediate possibility of self-rule if anticolonial actors took their own moral authority as the source of political action. Even Gandhi's most sustained attempt at articulating an alternative vision of self-ruling community—i.e., the village republic—was driven by self-conscious efforts to eschew collective authority. Gandhi instead turned to the cooperative power generated from individual self-sacrifice to ground an alternative collectivity. Gandhi's repudiation of the co-constituted ideals of development and peoplehood helped anticolonial politics break free of the crisis encountered by early swaraj theorists, yet the same principle would also resist institutional consolidation of the Gandhian vision of swaraj. Read in the context of his predecessors' struggle to authorize swaraj in the name of the people, Gandhi's moral theory of self-rule emerges as an attempt to displace, if not to resolve, the terms of the colonial problem of peoplehood.

### **The Colonial Paradox of Peoplehood**

The politics of deferral encountered a powerful political challenge with the outbreak of the Swadeshi movement in 1905. Triggered by the partition of Bengal into two separate administrative units, the Swadeshi movement mobilized urban masses in major colonial provinces such as Bengal and Bombay, foregrounding the principles of the economic boycott of British goods and the attendant development of indigenous industries and institutions.<sup>13</sup> The

---

<sup>13</sup> See Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-08* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black Press, 2010); Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 242-85.

newfound political agency of the masses<sup>14</sup> emboldened the critics of imperial sovereignty who began to characterize the Congress' invocations of imperial norms as a form of self-deprecating "mendicancy."<sup>15</sup> Amid the unfolding political unrest, the "Grand Old Man of India" was summoned from virtual retirement to preside over the yearly session of the Congress after the moderate and extremist wings of the platform failed to agree on other options.<sup>16</sup> To the surprise of his younger colleagues, Naoroji would explicitly distance himself from the politics of deferral associated with late nineteenth-century Indian liberalism.

The critical element in Naoroji's presidential speech resided in two aspects. First, the imperial discourse of gradual progression to self-government—a discourse that Naoroji once accepted more faithfully—was emphatically rejected: "It is futile to tell me that we must wait till all the people are ready. The British people did not so wait for their parliament. We are not allowed to be fit for 150 years. We can never be fit till we actually undertake the work and the responsibility."<sup>17</sup> The time of self-government, therefore, could no longer be suspended. A people, Naoroji argued, become ready for self-government by way of practicing it. The second decisive element in Naoroji's speech was the establishment of a mutual reinforcement between self-government and the development of the people. The author of *Poverty and the Un-British Rule in India* responded positively to Swadeshi demands by linking up the lack of economic

---

<sup>14</sup> There were only a handful of open-air public meetings in Kolkata, the capital of British India, in the nineteenth century. The practice of public protests would dramatically proliferate with the rise of the mass anticolonial movement in the early twentieth century, beginning with the Swadeshi movement. See Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-08*. (Ranikhet: Permanent Black Press, 2010), 216.

<sup>15</sup> Ghose, "Is Mendicancy Successful?," in *Bande Mataram*, 173-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ghose, "Secret Tactics," in *ibid.*, 150.

<sup>17</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, "Calcutta Congress Presidential Address," in *Speeches and Writings of Dadabhai Naoroji* (Madras: G.A. Nathesen & Co., 1917), 79.

development in India with the absence of self-government: “Once self-government is attained, then will there be prosperity enough for all, but not till then.”<sup>18</sup> Naoroji concluded his speech with a passionate plea reiterating the developmental urgency of self-government: Indians must achieve the right of self-government to save the “millions now perishing by poverty, famine, and plague, and the scores of millions that are starving on scanty subsistence.”<sup>19</sup>

The speech itself registered an unsustainable dual commitment. Whereas the demand of self-government was untethered from an indefinite preparatory phase, the political strategy he defended reaffirmed the importance of appealing to imperial authority and the British people. Echoing the project of “Greater Britain,” he argued that by birth, Indians should be considered British citizens, and therefore, they also should enjoy the right to self-government like other colonies of the empire.<sup>20</sup> Naoroji backed up this claim by meticulously reproducing the pledges of future self-government made by the Queen and colonial administrators. The first half of the speech, reproducing the summaries of his political and scholarly work over the previous few decades, elaborated an interpretation of imperial sovereignty that stressed the fairness and justness of the British imperial norms. The much-derided “mendicant” method of politics was duly defended as an important strategy to convince the British of the justness of Indian demands: “I am not ashamed of being a mendicant... I appeal to the Indian people for this [political union],

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>20</sup> See Dadabhai Naoroji, “Address to the Electors of Holborn,” in *ibid.*, 201. While the discourse of Greater Britain never quite took off in colonial India (and it was also generally excluded from the British discussions on the topic), Naoroji’s career as a member of the British Parliament likely inflected his argument with the aspects of the Greater Britain project. See Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

because it is in their own hands... just as I appeal to the British people for things that are entirely in their hands.”<sup>21</sup> It was up to Indians to overcome their differences, to peacefully agitate, and to raise funds for the political agenda. The sovereign authority nonetheless remained in the hands of the British people, and there was no alternative to convince them of the rightness of Indian demands. Naoroji’s demand of immediate self-government consciously steered clear of invoking the sovereign authority of the Indian people. Just as parliamentary government existed in England before the voting rights of the masses, “a good beginning” could be made without waiting for the full development of the Indian people.<sup>22</sup> In other words, Naoroji’s figuration of the people as a developmentally incomplete entity enabled the demand for Indian self-government, while simultaneously affirming the positing of sovereignty in the British. As a result, Naoroji’s call for *swaraj* essentially amounted to a proposal for splitting the question of (British) sovereignty from that of (Indian) self-government.

The immediate reception of Naoroji’s speech reflected this tension over self-government without sovereignty. Moderates within the Congress, such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, found common ground with specific strategies such as the Indianization of the civil services. But Naoroji’s suspension of gradualist reformism caught them by surprise. A.C. Mazumdar—a moderate Congress member himself, and a perceptive, if partisan, narrator of the Congress politics of the period—summed up the situation this way:

“The first resolution was announced by the extremist press as the *Swaraj* resolution, though the dubious word *Swaraj* was to be found nowhere in the resolution itself, and was used only once by the President [Naoroji] in his inaugural address, of course, in a perfectly legitimate sense. The separatists evidently smarted under a sense of wrong and throughout the year that followed kept up an agitation through the columns of their

---

<sup>21</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, “Calcutta Congress Presidential Address,” 92.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

papers as well as upon the platforms decrying the Congress and preaching the utter futility of the Congress propaganda.”<sup>23</sup>

One of the resolutions passed by the Calcutta session— containing the demand that “system of government obtaining in the Self-Governing Colonies should be extended to India, and that, as steps leading to it, it urges that the following reforms should be immediately carried out”— generated much interpretative disagreement between Congress’ opposing groups.<sup>24</sup> The extremists dubbed it the swaraj resolution, whereas the moderates led by Gokhale stressed the absence of the word swaraj from the official resolution. Furthermore, Gokhale characterized the demand of “self-government as in the colonies” a mere preamble to more concrete demands (e.g., Indianization of public services) that followed it.<sup>25</sup> Endorsing gradual reformism, Gokhale interpreted Naoroji’s declaration of “self-government as in the colonies” as a mere preamble to his concrete institutional demands such as the Indianization of the civil services. The Congress moderates found no merit in the arguments for immediate self-government owing to the practical political problems that an “underdeveloped” Indian people would encounter were it given the right to form its own government.

For the “extremists,” the “politics of petition” endorsed by Naoroji was no match for the urgency he freshly attributed to the demand for swaraj. Although “extremist” political thinkers, such as Bipin Chandra Pal (who disavowed his earlier proimperial politics and reinvented himself as a leading voice of the extremist faction) and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, would eventually—and without qualification—identify Naoroji as the originator of the “political idea”

---

<sup>23</sup> A.C. Mazumdar, *The Indian National Evolution: A Study of the Origin and Growth of the Indian National Congress* (New Delhi: Michiko & Panthajan, 1915), 89.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

of swaraj, their initial reaction was rather mixed. Speaking a few days after the conclusion of the Calcutta Congress Session, Tilak offered an immediate appraisal of Naoroji's presidential speech. After spending a quarter century "trying to convince the English people of the injustice that is being done to us," Naoroji's retraction exemplifies the end of the mode of politics that appealed to the "benevolence" and moral norms of the British.<sup>26</sup> Naoroji's account of swaraj, therefore, was incomplete, and his reliance on pledged rights and on the Queen's proclamation politically naive and unhelpful to the cause of swaraj.<sup>27</sup> The critical ire of the extremist group was directed primarily at the faith in imperial sovereignty, especially questioning the assumption that the British would provide meaningful rights and opportunities of self-rule.<sup>28</sup>

Following from this debate, one of the earliest and most influential elaborations of the swaraj concept was offered by Bipin Chandra Pal. Subjecting Naoroji's speech to close reading, Pal found irresolvable ambiguity in the former's statement that Indians want "self-government, as in the United Kingdom or the Colonies, i.e., Swaraj." Swaraj in the fashion of the United Kingdom would mean complete independence, including the rights of self-legislation and autonomy over foreign relations. If conceived in the form of the white British colonies, i.e., Australia and Canada, the extent of swaraj would be limited but still quite meaningful. The racism underlying British imperialism, Pal argued, would make a political arrangement in the form of Canada or Australia impossible.<sup>29</sup> The major "revelation" of swaraj was instead that "there is a natural, a fundamental conflict between the self and the not-self in the political affairs

---

<sup>26</sup> Bal Gangadhar Tilak, "Tenets of the New Party," in *Bal Gangadhar Tilak: His Writings and Speech* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922 [1907]), 57

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-3.

<sup>28</sup> Ghose, "The *Times* on Congress Reforms," in *Bande Mataram*, 139.

<sup>29</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal, *Swadeshi and Swaraj* (Calcutta: Yugayatri Prakashak, 1954), 150-4.

of the country.”<sup>30</sup> The trouble with imperial sovereignty lay precisely in its obfuscation of the self-other distinction. As long as the imperial sovereign was taken as the source of “wealth,” “honor,” and “strength” Indians would fail to cultivate an autonomous sense of the self.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Pal’s critique of the prevailing understanding of swaraj as self-government within empire did not amount to an outright call for independence. Pal’s account of swaraj was rather suggestive of what the historian Sumit Sarkar termed “constructive Swadeshi”—an approach marked by its emphasis on self-development as opposed to the reliance on British help.<sup>32</sup> The intellectual, physical, and economic “degenerations” of Indians under colonial rule had made swaraj in the form of an independent state an unfeasible immediate goal. The historical lack of nationhood in India would further make it difficult to sustain a sovereign polity.<sup>33</sup> To be fit for swaraj, Indians must first register organic growth and internal development.<sup>34</sup> Although Pal polemically characterized “underdevelopment” as “degradation,” the larger problem of deferral remained unresolved.

Pal specified two forms of “training” essential for the development process. “Subjective training” would consist in directing the sources of honor and strength to the self, while cultivating an aversion to all that emanates from the empire. In contrast, “objective training” would be based on the founding of “civic organization” outside of the machinery of the colonial government. These self-governing institutions would work as a “school of civic duties for the

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>32</sup> Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, 39-53.

<sup>33</sup> Pal elaborated this point in one of his Bengali texts. See Bipin Chandra Pal, *Nabajuger Bangla* (Kolkata: Bipin Chandra Pal Institute, 1964), 212-33.

<sup>34</sup> Pal, *Swadeshi and Swaraj*, 198.

people.”<sup>35</sup> In the period of training, the “longing for emancipation” —as manifested in calls for complete severance of the British connection—would play a heuristic role: it would remind Indians of “the existence of bondage and a keen sense of it.”<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, this commitment to the primacy of organic growth of the Indian people — as I noted earlier—had helped Pal support his defense of colonial government in the 1880s. After his turnaround, the possibility of organic growth, now dissociated from the empire, was linked inextricably to the practices of self-rule outside of the colonial state. In any case, Pal’s account of self-rule — out of its simultaneous aversion to imperial sovereignty and acceptance of the underdevelopment (“degeneration”) of the people—ended up reinstating a politics of deferral. Before the full formation of the sovereign people, swaraj would mean extracolonial political training, aiming to generate peoplehood without relying on British help.

Unlike Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak refused to fully externalize the pursuit of swaraj from the colonial state. If the “old party” sought to achieve self-government through petitioning and appealing to the English people, the “new party,” Tilak asserted, would do it through boycott.<sup>37</sup> Through the democratic pressure of boycott, Indians who worked as “useful lubricants” in the operation of the bureaucratic machinery should try to take control of the government itself: “I want to have the key of my house and not merely one stranger turned out of it. Self-government is our goal; we want a [sic] control over our administrative machinery.”<sup>38</sup> This otherwise instrumental account of self-rule was undergirded by a rejection of the notion that development is a politically neutral issue. The objects of development—education, for example—were not a

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>37</sup> Tilak, *Speeches and Writings*, 61-5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 64.

neutral enterprise that could be separated from the identity of rulers. Because of the fundamental conflict of interest between India and its colonial rulers, the kind of education required to develop Indians as “good citizens” and to facilitate “scientific” and “industrial” development could never be imparted by the latter.<sup>39</sup> That the state of the Indian people needed to be developed was central to Tilak’s argument, but the nature of that development could no longer be an objective question of good government. The promise of the British rulers to extend the right of self-government once “the people” overcame their “social inferiority” previously legitimated colonial rule.<sup>40</sup> Tilak thus argued the failure of the British to advance Indian development, despite a century and half long period of rule, should invalidate the deferral of self-government on the same ground.

Having simultaneously defined swaraj as the Indian control of the government and rejected the sovereign authority of the empire, Tilak encountered a dilemma. Much like Pal, Tilak’s argument for self-rule retained the primacy of developmentalism, offering no immediate alternative to imperial sovereignty. At the same time, Tilak’s preference for boycott as a way of forcing the British to accede to the demand of self-rule meant that the appeal to the norms of imperial sovereignty was firmly rejected. He attempted to resolve the dilemma explicitly at the level of political sovereignty, although it would prove to be a rather difficult endeavor. Singling out contemporary efforts to characterize colonial rule as a form of contract, Tilak argued that the sovereignty of the emperor was not discernible through the framework of the social contract because “the word ‘contract’ cannot be made applicable to relations existing [between] unequals”. The “English idea” of sovereignty understood popular agitation as an attempt to

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 82-3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 43.

“enforce the terms of... an agreement.” The “Eastern idea,” in contrast, took both the king and the subjects as part of “the Godhead.” If the king strays from the principles of justice, the subjects have a duty to “control the power of the king.”<sup>41</sup> The abuse of the divine power given to the king transforms him into an evil force, legitimating his replacement with a “new deity.” Tilak, however, did not elaborate on the “new deity,” required for the age of swaraj. Rendering both the people and the king as part of the godhead, Tilak, at that point, worked around, instead of directly addressing, the dilemma.

On his return from exile, almost a decade later, Tilak attempted another, less ambitious, response to this problem. He suggested an analytical distinction between “invisible” and “visible” government to better define the elusive concept of swaraj. The emperor pertained to the invisible government, a political entity separated from the problems of administration and management. The advisory role of the invisible sovereign is needed because “what [Indians] have to do [they] must do with the help of some one or another, since [they] are in such a helpless condition.”<sup>42</sup> It is the absence of the people’s full self-dependence that necessitated the guidance of the British sovereign. The question of swaraj, in contrast, pertained to the visible government. Although the invisible government could work as a trustee of the “house,” the people who lived there must control its administrative aspects. Pushing the question of sovereignty into the invisible realm, Tilak elaborated on the house metaphor:

Whatever you have to do, whatever you want—if you want to dig a well in your house—you have to petition to the Collector... When a boy is young he knows nothing. When he grows up he begins to know and then begins to think it would be very good if the management of the household was carried on at least to some extent according to his

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 108.

opinion. Just so it is with a nation... Let us give up the thought about invisible government, let us come within the limits of the visible government... This is the principle of *swarajya*.<sup>43</sup>

Much like Naoroji, Tilak, in his second attempt at defining *swaraj*, sought to analytically separate the concept from sovereignty, circumscribing it to the realm of government. Nevertheless, given his politically charged conception of development, the claim of self-government acquired a deeper, noninstrumental, significance. For Tilak, the Indian people were ready to run their own government with the “aid” and “help” of the “invisible” English sovereign. *Swaraj*, thus, would not immediately mean a replacement of the “sovereign authority” of the British, which is at the “root” of the power of visible government.<sup>44</sup> Tilak’s account of *swaraj* too ultimately fell back into the vicious cycle of appealing to imperial authority for the immediate right of self-government, pushing the possibility of popular sovereignty further into time.

Although evocative of what contemporary democratic theorists study under the framework of the paradox of founding, Indian attempts to institute *swaraj* against the developmental deferral of peoplehood show the limits of universalizing the terms of founding from European political thought.<sup>45</sup> The question of founding itself, since Rousseau, has been entangled in a paradox of the people. In Rousseau’s famous formulation, the “effect” of the founding by a “nascent people”—i.e., “social spirit” generated by good “laws”—would ideally

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 113-4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>45</sup> On this point, see Leigh Jenco, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12-15, 45-71.

have to be the “cause” itself for the process to be successful.<sup>46</sup> Although Rousseau’s attempt to resolve the dilemma by introducing the figure of the lawgiver found few takers, the larger implication of the paradox continues to resonate in democratic theory—including the problems of democratic legitimation (popular will versus collective good), constitutional democracy (constitutional versus popular sovereignty), and, to an extent, popular authorization.<sup>47</sup> As these early theories of swaraj illustrate, the overarching nature of colonial subjection meant that the questions of constitutionalism and democratic legitimation were not as central as the prior problem of grounding the claim of self-rule in the authorizing figure of the people. However, the developmental deferral of peoplehood generated an uncertainty over the presence of popular authority itself. It was precisely the not-yet claimable authority of the people that rendered the swaraj project caught in a cycle of deferral and suspension. Although the turning of developmentalism against colonial rule enabled the Indian demand for government, the very premise also reinforced the deferral of popular sovereignty (for Pal and Tilak) and even reconsolidated imperial sovereignty (for Naoroji). Marked by this debate over the meaning of

---

<sup>46</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 71.

<sup>47</sup> See William Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), 53-7; Seyla Benhabib, “Deliberative Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy,” *Constellations* 1, no. 1 (1994): 26–52; Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000); Alan Keenan, *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Bonnie Honig, “Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (2007): 1-17; Jason Frank, “‘Unauthorized Propositions’: ‘The Federalist Papers’ and Constituent Power,” *Diacritics* 37, no. 2-3 (2007): 103-120; Kevin Olson, “Paradoxes of Constitutional Democracy,” *American Journal of Politics Science* 51, no. 2 (2007): 330-343;; Paulina Ochoa Espejo, *The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and the Democratic State* (PA: Penn State University State, 2011).

swaraj, the Congress-led anticolonial movement eventually descended into a crisis with the fading of Swadeshi mass mobilization. By the end of the decade, Tilak was exiled, Pal and Ghose retired from active politics prematurely, and the moderates found themselves consigned to political irrelevance. The story of how an expatriate coming from South Africa, M.K. Gandhi, took Indian politics by storm a few years later and transformed the Indian anticolonial movement into one of the largest mass movements of the last century is well known.<sup>48</sup> Gandhi's political rise, however, was preceded by an act of genuine theoretical innovation.

### **The Gandhian Turn: The Self, the Collective, and the Time of Self-Rule**

Although Gandhi was based at the time on the distant shores of South Africa, his attention was captured almost instantly by Naoroji's call for swaraj at the Calcutta Congress Session. Writing in the local periodical *Indian Opinion*, less than two weeks after the Calcutta Session, Gandhi noted the immense publicity that Naoroji's "forceful and effective" speech had received. In his brief review of the address, Gandhi put the word swaraj at the forefront: "The substance of the address is that India will not prosper until we wake up and become united. To put it differently, it means that it lies in our hands to achieve swaraj, to prosper, and to preserve the rights we value."<sup>49</sup> In this earliest iteration of Gandhi's account of swaraj, the term was used without registering any meaningful opposition to the instrumentalist approach to self-government. Crucially, though, Gandhi stressed that it was up to Indians to achieve swaraj, diverging from Naoroji's affirmation of the necessity of appealing to the English people as a legitimate means of

---

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

<sup>49</sup> CWMG 6.208 (original emphasis) Excluding citations to *Hind Swaraj* (1997), all references to Gandhi's works are abbreviated as follows: CWMG for Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhi 1999), volume number precedes page number.

acquiring the rights of self-government. The most striking aspect of Gandhi's first—and brief—reflection on the question of self-rule was the dramatic assertion that swaraj could be achieved “this day” if Indians showed the strength of unity regardless of the fears of retribution, ostensibly breaking away from the long-drawn process of institutional training presupposed by his predecessors. Although the familiar Gandhian account of swaraj was yet to be articulated, this earliest commentary on the topic instantiates one continuous thread of his argument: the power to establish swaraj lies in the immediate moral authority of Indians. While imprisoned in South Africa, Gandhi offered an embryonic version of the reworked concept of swaraj in the conclusion to an article accompanying his translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. Addressing what by then had become a “cry for swarajya” in India, Gandhi argued that the meaning of swaraj is hardly understood.<sup>50</sup> If swaraj were understood as a means to secure self-interest à la the Natal whites, it would be “no better than hell.”<sup>51</sup> The two existing approaches to swaraj — the instrumentalist project of the physical expulsion of the British and the developmentalist project predicated on a faith in the politically transformative power of “big industries”—were both misleading: “Just as we cannot achieve real swarajya... by killing the British—so also will it not be possible for us to achieve it by establishing big factories in India.” “Real” swaraj could neither be achieved through mere Indian control of the government nor through the means of developmental activities. Its meaning instead consisted in moral restraint. The agent of moral action was the individual human being, and “a nation that has many such men always enjoys swarajya.”<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> CMWG 8.457

<sup>51</sup> CMWG 8.458

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Gandhi's intervention in the swaraj literature is often posited against the backdrop of a stereotyped extremist account. Anthony Parel has summarized the pre-Gandhian extremist accounts of swaraj "as complete sovereignty achieved through constitutional means if possible, but through other means if necessary."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the comparative political theorist Fred Dallmayr casts the pre-Gandhian career of swaraj as that of a "narrowly" strategic concept, denoting "nothing more than the expulsion of the British from India."<sup>54</sup> Yet neither Naoroji nor Tilak—two of Dallmayr's examples—fits well with this characterization. Rather, as the first section of this chapter has showed, the relationship between sovereignty and government had by no means been an easily resolved issue for Gandhi's predecessors. The developmental imperative generated a theoretical dilemma where the problem of peoplehood contradicted the project of political sovereignty. Gandhi himself, as I note in the previous paragraph, separately underscored these two—instrumental and developmentalist—approaches to the question of swaraj.

The archival source of such interpretations of the pre-Gandhian accounts of swaraj lies in the writings of the expatriate group associated with *The Indian Sociologist*. Edited by Shyamji Krishnavarma, *The Indian Sociologist* was an influential London-based periodical that also seized on the word swaraj following Naoroji's speech. For *The Indian Sociologist*, the question of self-rule amounted to the physical expulsion of the British from India. Gandhi came in

---

<sup>53</sup> Anthony J. Parel, "Editor's Introduction," in *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), xxx.

<sup>54</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "What is Swaraj? Lessons from Gandhi," in *Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (NY: Lexington Books, 2000), 105. The notable exception is Dalton (2012). Dalton acknowledges the influence of Pal, Ghose et al. on Gandhi's theory of swaraj, although his focus is primarily on their efforts to reconcile between "spiritual" (positive) and "political" (negative) meanings of swaraj. See Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-Violent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2-7.

contentious contact with the members of the India House—Krishnavarma, Savar- kar, Har Dayal et al. — during his two visits to London in 1906 and 1909.<sup>55</sup> Krishnavarma’s journal was also in circulation among the Indian community in South Africa.<sup>56</sup> In January 1908, *The Indian Sociologist* publicly announced their disapproval of Gandhi’s activism in South Africa and branded him as an ideologue of empire.<sup>57</sup>

An ardent follower of Herbert Spencer, Shyamji Krishnavarma’s political trajectory was not quite representative of the swaraj movement that was flourishing within the Congress during the same period.<sup>58</sup> The main difference consisted in Krishnavarma’s foregrounding of an instrumental conception of political power. Unlike the swaraj thinkers of the Congress concerned about laying the groundwork for a democratic government before instituting sovereignty, Krishnavarma defended the demand for complete independence with the claim that “given [independence], the future form of government will take care of itself.”<sup>59</sup> One central register of developmentalist politics —education—was regularly taken up by *The Indian Sociologist* to show the folly of the Congress. Dismissing any relationship between education and politics, they argued, on several occasions, that what mattered was the “possession of a stake in the country,” not literacy.<sup>60</sup> When a young India House associate assassinated the British official Curzon

---

<sup>55</sup> See Jonathan Hyslop, “An ‘Eventful’ History of Hind Swaraj: Gandhi between the Battle of Tsushima and the Union of South Africa,” *Public Culture* 23, no. 2 (2011): 299-319.

<sup>56</sup> “A Natal Journal’s Attitude Toward *The Indian Sociologist*,” *The Indian Sociologist* 6, no. 12 (1910): 47-48.

<sup>57</sup> “The Indian in the Transvaal Get Their Deserts,” *The Indian Sociologist* 4, no. 1 (1908): 1.

<sup>58</sup> See Inder Marwah, “Rethinking Resistance: Spencer, Krishnavarma, and *The Indian Sociologist*,” in *Colonial Exchanges: Political Theory and the Agency of the Colonized*, eds. Burke Hendrix and Deborah Baumgold (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 43-72.

<sup>59</sup> “India House,” *The Indian Sociologist* 1, no. 10 (1905): 38.

<sup>60</sup> “Education Not Necessary for Self-Government,” *The Indian Sociologist* 2, no. 9 (1906): 34.

Wyllie in London, Krishnavarma's journal found itself in the midst of political controversy.<sup>61</sup> Amid the chaos generated by the assassination, Gandhi landed in London to negotiate with British officials as a civil rights activist in South Africa. *Hind Swaraj* would be written on the return voyage to South Africa. This historical context of *Hind Swaraj* partly explains why the pre-Gandhian history of swaraj in Gandhi scholarship has often been reductive, focusing primarily on his disagreement with Krishnavarma's instrumentalist account of swaraj. The critical agenda of the text, as we shall see, was no less concerned with the developmentalist project and its constitutive crisis of authorization.

Written in the form of a dialogue between an editor and a reader, the opening chapters of *Hind Swaraj* briefly revisited the moderate-extremist divide of the Congress. Distancing himself from the extremist critique of the moderates (without identifying with the latter), Gandhi turned to the question that would pervade the rest of the text: What is swaraj? Swaraj understood as mere expulsion of colonizers from India, Gandhi famously argued, would amount to nothing more than a form of "English rule without the Englishman."<sup>62</sup> This indeed was the crux of Gandhi's dispute with *The Indian Sociologist*. For Gandhi, their imitative understanding of self-government—exhibited in the desire to "copy" English institutions—dovetailed with the instrumental method through which they sought to acquire swaraj. The extremist demand for swaraj thus boiled down to this:

Just as they do not allow others to obtain a footing in their country, so should we not allow them or others to obtain it in ours. What they have done in their own country has not been

---

<sup>61</sup> "English Tribute to Indian Martyrdom—Garibaldi's Advocacy of Wholesale Political Assassination," *The Indian Sociologist* 5, no. 9 (1909): 37.

<sup>62</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 28.

done in any other country. It is, therefore, proper for us to import their institutions.<sup>63</sup> Gandhi's reading of the "extremist" account of swaraj brought forth the underlying imitative and instrumentalist notions of rule. The argument centered on the expulsion of the colonizer was turned upside down as Gandhi located the source of such opposition to the "Englishman" in the uncritical faith that English political institutions are India's developmental destiny. He followed up this ingenious diagnosis of the "extremist" project with a dramatic, and wholesale, denunciation of the idealized British parliamentary system. Gandhi characterized the English parliament as an infantile institution devoid of any substance. The English people—the benchmark by which the developmentalist discourse measured colonial subjects—were claimed to be fickle and zealous, and thus deserving of their political institutions.

The problem of developmentalism took the center stage of the text as Gandhi turned from surveying the condition of England to that of India. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi's reflections on development were tied up with his critique of civilization. The Congress swaraj thinkers imperiled by the problem of developmentalism—specifically Tilak and Pal—did not appear directly in the text. Gandhi was personally familiar with Tilak and was certainly also aware of their writings in this period.<sup>64</sup> It was, in all likelihood, a deliberate choice. In any case, the hallmark of the Congress extremist account of swaraj—development through Indian-led political institutions—did not fall out of the scope of Gandhi's critique. Modern civilization, understood as material "progress," undercuts the importance of moral self-rule. Having explained India's colonial subjection as a result of the weakness of Indians rather than the

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>64</sup> See Stanley Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43.

strength of the British, Gandhi announced his rejection of all the products and agents of colonial modernity: railways and rail travelers, medicine and doctors, the legal system and lawyers, and so on.<sup>65</sup> These indubitable markers of the developmentalist paradigm, Gandhi argued, were implicated in the logic of subjection. The dependence on institutions such as the railways or modern medicine enabled further attrition of the individual's capacity to rule over itself. The ideals of progress, in other words, directly erode the capacity for, and defer the arrival of, self-rule.<sup>66</sup> The deeper import of this claim consists in reversing the necessary connection established between material and moral development, as evident in the pre-Gandhian theories of swaraj. In addition, whereas early swaraj thinkers traced the source of India's disunity in its material deprivation, Gandhi found sociological conflict to be no hindrance to the project of swaraj. It was the ability to accommodate difference—as opposed to an overarching political unity—that defined the political “fitness” of a nation.<sup>67</sup> Building on this argument, Gandhi ultimately indicted the developmental project with the charge of strengthening the hold of extraneous forces on the source of self-rule.

Gandhi's account of swaraj, rejecting the developmental paradigm *in toto*, shifted the emphasis to the self-authorizing individual. The first definition of swaraj he offered appeared to be straightforward enough: “It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves.” This definition was

---

<sup>65</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 35-8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. Gandhi's polemical defense of Indian “civilization” against Western “civilization” should be understood in this context. As he argues, India's “immovable” state—generally seen as the marker of “uncivilized” backwardness—is a manifestation of its rejection of the primacy of material progress. The rejection of the ideology of progress, for Gandhi, enables self-rule, leading him to the claim that Indian “civilization” is truer than its modern “progressive” European counterpart. See Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 66-70.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-57.

followed by a more ambiguous claim: “It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands.”<sup>68</sup> Gandhi then sharpened its critical implication for the developmentalist paradigm by arguing that swaraj was not a distant utopia, and hence, there was no need to be “sitting still” and waiting for it.<sup>69</sup> What Indians needed to acquire swaraj was not a temporally drawn-out process of institutional training. The politics of deferral, in other words, was explicitly rejected. Famously, while speaking at a special session of the Congress in 1920, Gandhi promised the attainment of swaraj in one year if his programs of noncooperation were properly adopted. This sudden declaration struck contemporary political observers as unrealistic and irresponsible. Responding to “much laughter [that] has been indulged in at [his] expense,” Gandhi wrote that his “proposition” had a “mathematical” certainty. If individual Indians took themselves to be their own authority and act accordingly, the “time” of swaraj would be solely dependent on them.<sup>70</sup> Gandhi expanded on the claim that swaraj is immediately available with one pivotal move: “[it] has to be experienced by each one for himself.”<sup>71</sup> To be able to rule over oneself, however, one must be able to exercise self-control. Gandhi’s advocacy of certain practices—chastity, spinning, and fearlessness, among others—is related to the cultivation of self-control.<sup>72</sup> To this extent, self-rule and self-control are inseparable.<sup>73</sup> Critical of the defense of impatience as a political virtue,<sup>74</sup> Gandhi affirmed the

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> CWMG 21.280

<sup>71</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 73.

<sup>72</sup> See Farah Godrej, “Gandhi, Foucault, and the Politics of Self-Care,” *Theory & Event* 20, no.4 (2017): 894-922.

<sup>73</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 118.

<sup>74</sup> See Alex Livingston, “Fidelity to Truth: Gandhi and the Genealogy of Civil Disobedience.” *Political Theory* 46, no. 4 (2-16): 511-536; Uday Mehta, “Patience, Inwardness, and Self-Knowledge in Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*,” *Public Culture* 23, no. 2 (2011): 417-429.

possibility of immediately authorizing oneself to enact swaraj, while emphasizing the patient work on the self needed to cultivate self-control and to avoid the temptations of instrumental action.

Crucial to Gandhi's turn to the self in *Hind Swaraj* is a disavowal of the problem of collective authorization. For Gandhi, swaraj constituted not only a rejection of appeal to imperial sovereignty but also a critique of the alternative, if deferred, ideal of popular sovereignty. As he put it later: "Swaraj will not be a gift from anyone. It will not fall from above, nor will it be thrown up from below."<sup>75</sup> The problem with the framework of rights lies in its dependence on a higher authority.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, if individuals approach their actions as a form of self-enacted "duty," then the necessity of being authorized by a higher agent can be bypassed.<sup>77</sup> It is from the "want of faith in duty" that actors "wait" for the "majority" before engaging in action.<sup>78</sup> Gandhi's critique of developmentalist and instrumentalist accounts of swaraj, thus, also entailed a rejection of appealing to—and waiting for the arrival of—the people. In the conclusion to *Hind Swaraj*, following a list of programs that Gandhi offered, the reader asked: "This is a larger order. When will all carry it out?" Gandhi answered: "You make a mistake. You and I have nothing to do with the others. Let each do his duty. If I do my duty, that is, serve myself, I shall be able to serve others."<sup>79</sup> Just as "one drowning man will never save another," swaraj, too, must be acquired by

---

<sup>75</sup> CWMG 23.71-72.

<sup>76</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 82.

<sup>77</sup> Complementary to this argument is Gandhi's claim that action must be indifferent to its "fruits." Taken together, they instantiate the extent to which Gandhi was willing to go to liberate moral action from its reliance on external authority or incentive. See *The Gospel of Selfless Action or the Gita According to Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1946), 132.

<sup>78</sup> CWMG 21.101

<sup>79</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 118.

individuals before they can hope to impart it to others.<sup>80</sup> As Gandhi would note some three decades later: “Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals.”<sup>81</sup>

In the span of a few years, the author of *Hind Swaraj* emerged as the undisputed leader of the Congress, which continued to frame its political objectives in terms of institutional reforms. This tension surfaced in Gandhi’s 1921 preface to *Hind Swaraj* where he made a distinction between “parliamentary” and “individual” swaraj. His use of the phrase—parliamentary swaraj—has prompted Anthony Parel to resolve the tension between the self and the collective in Gandhi’s work by specifying two distinctive kinds of swaraj: individual and political.<sup>82</sup> This interpretative attempt, however, is undercut by the absence of any corresponding account of institutional politics in Gandhi’s work. While it is true that Gandhi uses the term “parliamentary swaraj” in the new preface, he also distinguished between the demand of the movement he was leading “in accordance to the wishes of the people of India” and what he himself had envisioned in *Hind Swaraj* and still continued to “individually” work toward.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, speaking in 1918, Gandhi noted that having a parliament meant having the right to err. The place of the parliament, if India were to have one, would be no greater than its “cottages.”<sup>84</sup> Such

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>81</sup> CWMG 75.178-179.

<sup>82</sup> See Anthony J. Parel, *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57; Anthony J. Parel, *Pax Gandhiana: The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 73-93; Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-Violent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 21.

<sup>83</sup> CMWG 22.260; Dipesh Chakrabarty and Rochona Majumdar have also pointed out Parel’s discounting of this caveat. See, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Rochona Majumdar, "Gandhi's Gita and Politics As Such" *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 345.

<sup>84</sup> CMWG 16.117.

deflationary views of the parliament—and modern representative institutions—persisted in Gandhi’s work throughout the long period he led the Congress.<sup>85</sup>

That Gandhi likened the parliament to Indian cottages helps reveal a fundamental refusal to take the political as a distinct or privileged site of action. Gandhi’s moral philosophy shares little with traditional moral idealism,<sup>86</sup> and it generally challenges moral evasions of political conflicts.<sup>87</sup> Since his rise in the anticolonial movement, Gandhi would be frequently critiqued for conflating politics with morality and spirituality. As Tilak argued contra Gandhi in 1920: “politics is a game of worldly people, not of sadhus [saints],” and thus requires norms and practices specific to the political domain.<sup>88</sup> Gandhi, in his reply, resisted the separation between the moral and the political: “it betrays mental laziness to think that the [political] world is not for sadhus.”<sup>89</sup> Gandhi’s theory of action, then, was not so much a withdrawal from politics, but rather a refusal to accept that the political domain requires a form of action different from that of moral self-rule.

This struggle to reconcile “individual” and “parliamentary” visions of swaraj is illustrative of a recurring question in Gandhi scholarship: what is political about Gandhi’s turn to the self? For all his dramatic influence over anticolonial politics, Gandhi has long been interpreted as a moral thinker whose politics was a “consequence of his view of morality.”<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> see especially CMWG 81.355-357

<sup>86</sup> See Karuna Mantena, “Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Non-Violence,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 455-470.

<sup>87</sup> See Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Shrutu Kapila, “Self, Spencer and Swaraj: Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism, 1890-1920.” *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2007): 109-127.

<sup>88</sup> Bal Gangadhar Tilak, “L. Tilak’s Letter,” *Young India* 2, no. 1 (1920): 3.

<sup>89</sup> CWMG 19.331; see also CWMG 11, 38-42

<sup>90</sup> Raghavan N. Iyer. *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 48.

Gandhi's well-documented aversion to institutional politics, of course, easily lends itself to such interpretation. Attempts to salvage an institutional vision of politics, as in Parel's, struggle to find an appreciation of the autonomy of the political in Gandhi. Attending closely to the "disjuncture between morality and politics" in Gandhi's thought, Partha Chatterjee attributes Gandhi's political success to the mobilization of "collective moral will."<sup>91</sup> Others focus on how Gandhi's moral theory played a transformative role in democratizing the public sphere.<sup>92</sup> However, as we have seen, Gandhi's reconfiguration of the problem of authorization in Hind Swaraj brings a different political dimension of his theory of self-rule to the fore. Gandhi's turn to the moral authority of the self was a simultaneous refusal of developmentalist and institutional constraints on anticolonial action. Once extricated from these constraints, anticolonial action would not need to wait for the arrival of a people developed enough to be sovereign. It is this intrinsic transformation of the temporality of anticolonial action that generated the political character of Gandhi's ethical turn. To this extent, Gandhi's re-invention of the concept of swaraj, notwithstanding its ethical form, immanently addressed the pervasive colonial problem of collective authorization.

Given the primacy of self-authorized moral action, what then explains Gandhi's idealization of the village as a collective political form? Gandhi's reflections on the village republic have led to different interpretations. On the one hand, Uday Mehta interprets Gandhi's turn to the village as an exemplar of the "ethics of everyday life," indifferent to the collective

---

<sup>91</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 92, 108.

<sup>92</sup> Lloyd Rudolph and Susan Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 152.

terms of modern politics.<sup>93</sup> Karuna Mantena, on the other hand, builds a case for positing the village republic as the institutional actualization of Gandhi's vision of swaraj: "voluntary," "antistatist," and grounded in a "non- hierarchical form of authority."<sup>94</sup> Mantena's argument that Gandhi developed his institutional alternative to the state-form through a voluntary and individual actor-centered rethinking of political association captures the animating concerns of his account of the village republic. However, insofar as the question of political authority is concerned, I suggest that Gandhi's quest for a nondevelopmental and nonhierarchical source of action led him to break fundamentally from any extraindividual notion of authority. Moving away from collective authority, Gandhi turned to the power of individual self-sacrifice to theorize the possibility of a collective bond in his ideal political community. Bridging the individual satyagrahi to the wider collectivity, the cooperative power of self-sacrifice is what allows Gandhi to make space for collectivity without undermining his individual-oriented theory of swaraj. To be clear, Gandhi's notion of selfhood is not a possessive theory of individualism; it is rather the power of "nonpossession" that marks the Gandhian individual actor.<sup>95</sup> Gandhi theorizes the village—the site proper of his constructive program<sup>96</sup>—as a political collectivity which is ultimately authorized and sustained by the self-sacrificing power of individual actors. He however, was acutely aware of how the practices of sacrifice can facilitate sovereignty over

---

<sup>93</sup> See Uday Mehta, "Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 355-371.

<sup>94</sup> Karuna Mantena, "Gandhi's Critique of the State: Sources, Contexts, Conjunctures" *Modern Intellectual History* 9, no. 03 (2012): 559.

<sup>95</sup> Ajay Skaria, *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 13.

<sup>96</sup> CWMG 88.325

others.<sup>97</sup> The challenge for him, then, was to articulate an account of self-sacrifice that is not generative of the sovereign-subject relationship.

What binds the individual with greater entities is their willingness to “perish for the village.” Indeed, the “law” that would govern “every villager is that he will suffer death in the defense of his and his village’s honor.”<sup>98</sup> As Gandhi would later elaborate, the relationship of the individual to the collective is more like an “oceanic circle” than a pyramidal structure.<sup>99</sup>

Gandhi’s elaboration of the nature of the village community in the 1940s—a theme already present in *Hind Swaraj*—further emphasized the horizontal and seamless relationship between the individual and the collective. The village community

“will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.”<sup>100</sup>

The authority of the self is neither undermined nor delegated to a higher level for the purpose of holding together the collective. It is instead the self-authorized sacrifice of the self that binds the collective. Although the individual actor retains sovereignty insofar as their sacrifice is willed and sustained by continuous self-discipline, the containment of sacrifice within the self is meant to resist its transformation into sovereignty over others. For Gandhi, between the singular (individual) and the universal (collective), as the philosopher Akeel Bilgrami argues, the only

---

<sup>97</sup> Skaria. *Unconditional Equality*, 91-3.

<sup>98</sup> CMWG 83.113

<sup>99</sup> CMWG 91.326

<sup>100</sup> CMWG 91.326

link is the power of setting up examples.<sup>101</sup> To return to Gandhi's metaphor: since one drowning person cannot save another, the best one can do is to learn how to swim and set an example for others. When anticolonial actors enact self-rule on themselves, they neither act for an already existing collective nor rationalize their action as the part of a gradual development. This is also the presupposition that leads Gandhi to repeatedly claim that his project of swaraj requires no waiting.

\*\*\*

This was a resolution that generated its own contradiction. With Gandhi, the anticolonial movement acquired a popular character, opening up what had hitherto been a relatively limited terrain of high politics. The theoretical source of Gandhi's politically transformative effect, I argued, lay in displacing anticolonial politics from its incapacitating entanglement in a dilemma of collective authorization. Instead of negotiating the problem from within, Gandhi rejected the ideal of collective peoplehood in the process. In a way, then, Gandhi's theory of self-rule was an attempt to break free of both the (collective) self and (developmentalist) rule. This feature of Gandhi's account of swaraj would become concretely materialized with his emergence as the main leader of the Congress in the late 1910s. As Jawaharlal Nehru recounted later, Gandhi, even at the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement, remained "delightfully vague" regarding the institutional form of swaraj.<sup>102</sup> Maintaining ambiguity regarding the nature of postimperial polity, Gandhi began to deploy the language of swaraj to address issues ranging from timeliness

---

<sup>101</sup> Akeel Bilgrami. "Gandhi, the Philosopher," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 39 (2003): 4162.

<sup>102</sup> Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: John Day Company, 1941), 74.

to religious tolerance. What remained consistent in his indiscriminate uses of the word, however, is the point that the power to enact self-rule lies in the moral authority of individual actors.

Even as he rejected almost every premise of imperial sovereignty in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi did not take the problem of empire to be the decisive test for swaraj. His denunciation of imperialism was not necessarily accompanied by its prioritization as the main challenge facing the swaraj project. When Gandhi returned to India at the height of the Great War, the political scene was dominated by the demand for self-government within empire—a subdued inheritance from the early agitations for swaraj. Gandhi, at that point, did not contest the goal of self-government within empire. In fact, he took initiatives to recruit soldiers for the British army during the First World War. In the course of his controversial recruitment campaign, Gandhi offered neither instrumental nor loyalist legitimation for his decision to serve the empire. While the goal of self-government within empire might not have been his chosen agenda, he maintained that those who aspire to it “must be equally prepared to sacrifice themselves for the Empire in which they hope and desire to reach their final status.”<sup>103</sup> That act itself would secure the end, i.e., self-government, he suggested.<sup>104</sup> The answer to this curious response to the problem of empire lies in Gandhi’s understanding of the means and end of action. As a moral thinker, Gandhi was more interested in the means than the end: “They say ‘means are after all means.’ I would say ‘means are after all everything.’ As the means so the end.”<sup>105</sup> Instead of

---

<sup>103</sup> CWMG 17.10. Gandhi makes a series of other arguments regarding the recruitment process; but, as Faisal Devji has rightly pointed out, the crux of Gandhi’s case for imperial service concerned the paradoxical wish to acquire “detachment” from the empire through a very act of sacrifice for it. See Faisal Devji, “Gandhi’s Great War,” in *India and World War I: A Centennial Assessment*, eds. Roger D. Long and Ian Talbot (London: Routledge, 2018), 191-206.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> CWMG 28:310.

problematizing the “goal” of imperial citizenship, he was eager to subvert the (often developmental) means laid out toward that end.<sup>106</sup> He argued provocatively that it was self-authorized, “voluntary sacrifice” that would render the relationship between imperial masters and subjects obsolete.<sup>107</sup> Insofar as the Indian anticolonial movement sought self-government within empire, Gandhi’s response was to refuse the structure of political authorization rather than to preoccupy himself with the content of the political demand.

When the goal of the anticolonial movement transformed into independent statehood in the 1930s, Gandhi’s logic of action remained the same. For Gandhi, to conceive of the people as an authority who could bestow sovereignty is to misunderstand self-rule. He was equally apprehensive about standing for the people—to call upon the masses before they were ready to be the source of their own action.<sup>108</sup> This no doubt presents a very idiosyncratic picture of the twentieth century’s most iconic anticolonial actor. Gandhi’s project does not directly fit either the problem (alien rule) or the solution (collective sovereignty) associated with the familiar picture of anticolonialism. Yet the issue here is not so much this familiar picture (which I will engage with and question in Chapter 5), but Gandhi’s startling distance from it. Modern colonialism not so much denied but rather deferred the possibility of self-rule for the colonized.

---

<sup>106</sup> On Gandhi’s provocative reflections on the means-end of action, see Mantena, *Another Realism*.

<sup>107</sup> Mahadev Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi* (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh, 1968), 128.

<sup>108</sup> Gandhi, however, was no anarchist. He was disinterested in drawing an alternative normative order from his account of moral self-rule. Nor was he necessarily distrustful of political authorities—he advised the masses to obey the existing authority if they are not ready to be master of their own action. Gandhi also had no meaningful investment in construing organicist collectivities as the alternative source of political association. He had no fundamental objection against the idea of rule—what he wanted is to displace the burden of rule and authorization from an external authority to that of the moral authority of individuals. For an “anarchist” reading of Gandhi’s political thought, see Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1946).

Gandhi overturned the (collective) source and criteria of political action to paradoxically recover self-rule from its developmental disavowal in the colonies. This is precisely what was at the core of his extraordinary uptake in anticolonial movements in India and elsewhere.

What made his account of swaraj so generative for anticolonial political action was also what resisted its consolidation in programmatic or institutional terms.<sup>109</sup> Consider, for example, this well-known series of exchanges between Gandhi and Nehru (the soon-to-be first prime minister of independent India). Writing to Nehru in 1945, Gandhi affirmed the vision of *Hind Swaraj*, particularly the ideal of the village republic, and suggested a Congress Working Committee meeting to discuss the topic. Nehru expressed disbelief in response to his mentor's continued faith in the vision of *Hind Swaraj*, which he described as "unreal" and discordant with the times: "As you know, the Congress has never considered that picture [of village republic]... You yourself have never asked it to adopt it except for certain relatively minor aspects of it."<sup>110</sup> Nehru, accordingly, defended the importance of developmental programs to sustain and uplift the masses of the people, vetoing the proposal to initiate a conversation in the Congress around the topic of the village community.

Historically speaking, Nehru was not incorrect in recalling that neither the Congress nor Gandhi himself had pushed their political movement in the direction of the village republic. Gandhi's theory of self-rule was predicated on a disavowal of the logic of collective authorization presupposed by modern political institutions and movements. Although, as the

---

<sup>109</sup> For an account of Gandhi's "failure" to influence the formation of the postcolonial project, see Sandipto Dasgupta, "Gandhi's Failure: Anticolonial Movements and Postcolonial Futures." *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017): 647-662.

<sup>110</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters: Written Mostly to Jawaharlal Nehru and Some Written by Him* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 509.

leader of the anticolonial movement for nearly three decades, Gandhi encouraged individual actors to adopt the life of a satyagrahi, he consistently refrained from invoking the collective authority of the anticolonial movement to advance the project of the village republic. Gandhi's profound rejection of collective authority took shape during the political crisis that marked the era of Pal and Tilak. And he remained faithful to this principle up to the end of his long political career (of note here is his abstinence from the Constituent Assembly in the 1940s).

In the early 1920s, as the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement was coming to a close, a Bengali political activist interviewed a number of leading anticolonial actors about their definition of swaraj. The interviewees were a diverse pool of actors, representative of the plural constituencies of the Gandhi-led movement. They were all asked the same question: what does swaraj mean to them? The definition of swaraj varied widely—from a complete “severance” of the British connection to imperial federation to other forms of non-representative political arrangement. The following question asked if Gandhi's methods are the best means to the end of swaraj. While many interviewees differed with Gandhi's view of non-violence as a “creed” rather than a “policy,” none could dismiss the extraordinary power that the Gandhian non-violence unleashed while disarming the moral claim of the empire.<sup>111</sup> Gandhi rarely contested the “goal” of the anticolonial movement, be it the dominant “self-government within empire” in the 1910s or independent statehood in the 1930s and 1940s. Brushing aside the importance of “repeating” the goal, he continued to maintain that the “progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means.”<sup>112</sup> Still, given the ubiquitous uncertainty around the political form that swaraj would take, the concept would become suspect to the next generation

---

<sup>111</sup> Nagendrakumar Guha Roy, ed., *Swaraj Sadhanay Bangali* [Bengalis in Pursuit of Swaraj] (Kolkata: Saraswati Library, 1922).

<sup>112</sup> CWMG 61. 393.

of political actors in the age of self-determination in the 1920s.<sup>113</sup> Writing in 1928, Nehru stated that the older generation who had fought for swaraj had wanted the masses to participate in their fight, but had failed to consider the real economic “needs of the masses.”<sup>114</sup> The Congress ultimately adopted *Purna Swaraj* in 1929 (officially translated as “complete independence”), where the adjective “purna” stood for the severance of “the British connection.” The resolution of the problem of political sovereignty in the form of independent statehood neutralized the uncertainty over the definition of self-rule—an uncertainty that originally helped the swaraj literature thrive.

## Conclusion

Born out of a literary digression on Naoroji’s part, the word swaraj quickly transformed into a contentious concept. The transformation of a word into a concept, observes Reinhart Koselleck, takes place when “a single word is needed that contains—and is indispensable for *articulating*—the full range of meanings derived from a given sociopolitical context.”<sup>115</sup> The concept of swaraj enabled attempts to articulate anew the relationship among a set of ideas in their colonial context: self-government, sovereignty, and developmentalism. As we have seen in the previous chapter, its conceptual predecessor—self-government—was marked by a tenuous arrangement between foreign sovereignty and limited participation in the colonial administration. As the Swadeshi critics disclosed the order of hierarchical peoplehood underlying the liberal-imperialist structure of authorization, the swaraj concept arrived with the aspiration to refuse the deferral of

---

<sup>113</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “Swaraj and Socialism,” in *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Operation, 1972), 426.

<sup>114</sup> See *ibid.*, 371.

<sup>115</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “Introduction to Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 19 (emphasis added).

Indian self-rule. In their striving to turn to popular authority, the early swaraj thinkers revealed the still more foundational problem of colonial peoplehood. In nineteenth-century India, the poverty or illiteracy of the people was not merely understood as a moral or sociological lack—it redoubled as a developmental incapacity for political sovereignty. What is more, the pursuit of self-rule against this backdrop of the problem of peoplehood made the anticolonial democratic project a simultaneous exercise in overcoming colonialism and bringing into being a people “fit” to be sovereign.

As this chapter has argued, the swaraj theorists’ attempts to overcome the problem of peoplehood—from Naoroji’s to Gandhi’s—offer a rich resource for articulating the distinctive trajectory of popular sovereignty in the colonial world. The people, of course, is never a prepolitical entity; its meaning is articulated by contesting acts of claiming and speaking in the name of the people during the course of political struggle.<sup>116</sup> And, as Enrique Dussel notes, “the people is that strictly political category (because it is not properly sociological or economic) that appears as absolutely essential, despite its ambiguity.”<sup>117</sup> The search for swaraj in early twentieth-century India unfolded in the midst of the anticolonial struggle and was faced with the necessity to conceptualize the people beyond its colonial signification. However, the developmentalist conception of colonial peoplehood constituted a political background where claims had to be made while awaiting the arrival of a “fit” people. The dilemma of working between the “not-yet” popular sovereignty and the existing (and unacceptable) imperial sovereignty meant that the early swaraj thinkers were caught in a crisis. That this crisis of anticolonial politics was only sidestepped (though not quite resolved) after Gandhi’s sweeping

---

<sup>116</sup> On this point, see Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

<sup>117</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Twenty-Theses on Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 73.

disavowal of the co-constituted ideals of development and peoplehood is not a historical anomaly.

The dramatic influence of Gandhi over the Indian anticolonial movement has long perplexed historians of colonial India. In an influential study, Judith Brown sought to demystify Gandhi's rise to power by centralizing his hold over various political networks and the capacity to leverage and unify otherwise disparate political groups.<sup>118</sup> From an opposite perspective, Shahid Amin has famously suggested that the perceptions of Gandhi among Indian peasants were "at variance with those of local Congress and Khilafat leadership and clashed with the basic tenets of Gandhism itself."<sup>119</sup> That Gandhi was adept at cutting through political division and his popular appeal surpassed his words capture important aspects of his complex historical persona. But the intellectual source of his liberating impact on the anticolonial movement lay in his reworking of the ground of anticolonial action. His ethical turn to the self-authorizing actor in the context of the colonial paradox of peoplehood freed anticolonial politics, if momentarily, from the constraints of developmentalism. This is precisely what imbued Gandhi's refusal to speak for or in the name of the people with its paradoxically democratic affect. This chapter has thus presented a reading of Gandhi's intervention in the Indian political scene from within his intellectual horizon and in light of the formative debate over the meaning of swaraj.

Still, Gandhi's intervention was more of an interruption than a transformation of the colonial problem of peoplehood—and the larger democratic project. The institution of representative government remained the professed ideal of the anticolonial movement, even if it

---

<sup>118</sup> Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

<sup>119</sup> Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 342.

no longer held the same political sway. With the aim to overcome the “telos” of representative government, there emerged a new federalist turn in anticolonial political thought in the early twentieth century. The federalists broadly shared Gandhi’s critique of developmentalism, even as they were driven by a set of commitments quite distinct from the Mahatma. If Gandhi sought to stand outside of developmentalism and popular sovereignty, the federalists aimed to reframe and reimagine these problems. Together, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, they put up a monumental challenge to the inheritance from the nineteenth century. The following chapter delves deep into the federalist wager to find another time for anticolonial democracy.

## Chapter 4

### **Between the Many and the One: Anticolonial Federalism and Popular Sovereignty**

#### **Introduction:**

Writing in 1923, the Indian political thinker Radhakamal Mukerjee anticipated an imminent demise of “the nineteenth-century...dogma of political sovereignty.”<sup>1</sup> The inheritance from the nineteenth century lay in the framework of centralized sovereignty and the representative-represented hierarchy it instituted. The monist concept of sovereignty, Mukerjee argued, had bolstered the expansionist drive of modern European empires.<sup>2</sup> For Mukerjee, it was time for anticolonial politics to acknowledge and abandon the ruins of nineteenth-century political thought once and for all. Mukerjee hoped that the anticolonial turn to a pluralist conception of sovereignty would be more than an answer to the problem of centralized sovereignty; it would also be a testament to the possibility that the historical trajectory of the West need not be repeated in the Indian pursuit of “popular sovereignty.”<sup>3</sup> The plural and many-willed figure of

---

<sup>1</sup> Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East: A Study in Comparative Politics* (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1923), v.

<sup>2</sup> Mukerjee explained this point further in one of his Bengali texts: “The Utilitarians—Bentham, Mill et al.—thought that the world could be transformed into a heaven (of the European image) through the dissemination of the ideas of popular self-government and education under the leadership of the British.” For Mukerjee, the idealistic aim of nineteenth-century European imperialism to uplift the “backward peoples” is central to understanding its historical specificity. With the erosion of this discourse, European imperialism had transformed into a blatant striving for territorial sovereignty. Mukerjee’s hope about the imminent demise of territorial sovereignty partly emanated from this historical diagnosis. It might be worth noting that Mukerjee wrote this article a few months before the start of the First World War for the Bengali periodical *Prabasi*. The editor of the journal added a note apologizing for the delayed publication of the article, as Mukerjee correctly predicted the beginning of the Great War! See Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Manomay Bharat* (Kolkata: Indian Book Club, 1924 [1914]). 1-5. [Bengali, my translation].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

the people, Mukerjee argued, would simultaneously enable a democratic overcoming of imperialism and the discourse of historical development that underwrote it.

Radhakamal Mukerjee belonged to a group of early twentieth-century Indian political thinkers whose work critically participated in the global turn to pluralist political theory, with the aim to transform the political ideals undergirding the anticolonial movement. This anticolonial reworking of pluralist sovereignty facilitated the emergence of a federalist vision of the postcolonial future. The origins of Indian pluralist thought lay in Mukerjee's mentor, B.N. Seal's (1864-1938) critique of Hegel in the late nineteenth century. Critiquing "unilinear" approaches to the development of non-European political life, Seal's account of federalism—first articulated at the Universal Races Congress of 1911—transformed the question of sovereignty into a debate over the trajectory of historical development. Seal's case for federalism would be taken up by a host of anticolonial thinkers and actors, including Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968), and C.R. Das (1870-1925). Although the colonial history of pluralist political thought flourished in tandem with its Euro-American counterpart, its genealogy and conceptual scope was not a mere extension of the arguments of the latter.<sup>4</sup> As we shall see, the

---

<sup>4</sup> A series of influential pluralist texts authored by F.W. Maitland, J.N. Figgis, Harold Laski, G.D.H. Cole, and Ernest Barker appeared in Britain in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The origin of the pluralist project is generally traced to Maitland's translation of Otto von Gierke's *Das Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht* in 1900. Though Maitland's presentation of Gierke was important to the formation of British pluralism, the pluralist project would only be fully formed in the mid-1910s. On the other side of the Atlantic, John Dewey and Mary Parker Follett—directly inspired by their British counterparts—inaugurated a reconsideration of American democracy. The recently founded *New Republic* was also important in disseminating the pluralist elements of American progressive thought. There were important distinctions between the British and American strands of pluralist political thought, which is important to this chapter's arguments. For a comparative history of British pluralism and American progressive thought, see Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problem of the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). On the formation of the project of pluralist sovereignty in early

constitutive tension of pluralist political theory came strikingly alive in the colonial world. This chapter revisits this largely forgotten body of Indian political thought to explore how a far-reaching critique of unilinear developmentalism occasioned an anticolonial rethinking of the modern ideal of popular sovereignty.

The colonial career of the federalist project—brief, scattered, and historically unrealized—has lately generated substantial historiographical and theoretical interest.<sup>5</sup> The marginal status of anticolonial federalist thought owes a great deal to the narrative that anticolonial movements were predicated on the ideal of a centralized sovereign state. The victory of anticolonial nationalism by the second half of the twentieth century was emphatic and overwhelming. The postcolonial revisiting of anticolonial political thought was thus motivated by a desire to trace the formation of the centralized nation-state. As a result, the archives of federalist thought in Asia and Africa were left in the margins of anticolonial history. Against this backdrop, the renewed appreciation of the federalist project has helped raise new questions regarding the political ideals of anticolonial movements. For Frederick Cooper, the federalist project, enabled by a divided conception of sovereignty, sought to democratize empire without traveling through the telos of the nation.<sup>6</sup> Along the same line, Gary Wilder argues that the pragmatic context of underdevelopment led African anticolonial thinkers to posit the federal

---

twentieth-century British political thought, see Jeanne Morefield, “Urgent History: The Sovereignty Debates and Political Theory’s Lost Voices,” *Political Theory* 45, no. 2 (2017): 164-91.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of federalist political thought in the context of larger anticolonial nationalist thought, see Karuna Mantena, “Popular Sovereignty and Anti-Colonialism,” in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, eds. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 297-319.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 10.

order as the best means available for reconciling political rights with socio-economic equality, while a utopian spirit led them to envision “unprecedented arrangements for dwelling and thinking through which humanity could realize itself more fully.”<sup>7</sup> Others, however, are less sanguine. While acknowledging the historical failures of the anticolonial nationalist project, Partha Chatterjee characterizes the federalist turn as no more than an attempt to glorify “the possibility of a more benign empire where liberal colonized elites might share power with an enlightened imperial authority.”<sup>8</sup> Samuel Moyn, in a similar vein, finds no evidence of the “possibility” that federalism could displace anticolonial nationalism; it is instead a “fantasy” stemming from the disappointments with the postcolonial nation-state.<sup>9</sup>

For both the champions and critics of anticolonial federalism alike, its “counterfactual” archive has become a proxy to inquire if the nation-state was indeed inevitable. While I address the conceptual dilemma that entangled the attempts to claim popular authorization for the federalist project, my primary aim in this article is different. I demonstrate how the historical inevitability ascribed to “isolated independent sovereignty”—which was yet to be crystallized as what we now call the nation-state—prompted a perceptive critique of the narrative of historical development through which the political future of the colonies was articulated.<sup>10</sup> Indian anticolonial federalists keenly recognized that the ideal of representative government posited as

---

<sup>7</sup> Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Partha Chatterjee, “Empires, Nations, Peoples: The Imperial Prerogative and Colonial Exceptions,” *Thesis Eleven* 139, no. 1 (2017): 95.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Moyn, “Fantasies of Federalism,” *Dissent* 62, no. 1 (2015): 145–51.

<sup>10</sup> The expression “isolated independent sovereignty” was used by Bipin Chandra Pal in the 1910s to designate the monist vision of postcolonial sovereignty. In his Seal-inspired text *Nationality and Empire* (1916), Pal made a case for federalism along the line of Seal’s Races Congress speech. See Bipin Chandra Pal, *Nationality and Empire: A Running Study of Some Current Indian Problems* (Calcutta: Thacker Spink & Co., 1916), xxxiii.

the end of colonial rule was part of a larger narrative of development, ultimately inseparable from the world-historical justification of colonialism in the nineteenth century. Thus, in contrast to the British pluralists who primarily emphasized the normative limits of monist sovereignty, Seal and Mukerjee focused equally on the narrative of historical development built into the ideal of monist sovereignty, be it statist or popular. The move away from centralized representative government not only discredited the imperial claim to make the colonized fit for self-rule, but also the underlying theory of the “straight line of progress.” On this view, the history of local self-rule in the “East”—which had long fed into the caricature of oriental despotism—pointed toward another, federalist trajectory of democracy. This account of anticolonial federalism sought to critically overcome the reliance of dominant European conception of federalism on, as James Tully pointed out, the historicist and homogenizing project of bringing “less-developed and formerly colonized states into federation over time.”<sup>11</sup> For the Indian federalists, the contesting ideals of monist and plural sovereignty were more than two different constitutional arrangements: this dispute over sovereignty facilitated a reconsideration of the time of democracy itself.

For all their critique of the monist conception of sovereignty, these federalists understood their political project to be grounded on the ideal of popular sovereignty. The federalists argued that if the people is conceptualized as many-willed and the bearer of multilinear development, the two conditions which denied peoplehood to Indians—historical backwardness and sociological difference—could be overcome. However, the historical and conceptual grounding of the discourse of popular sovereignty on a territorially bound one and undivided people meant

---

<sup>11</sup> James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume II, Imperialism and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 145.

that the question of peoplehood could not readily be dissociated from the premises of monist sovereignty. This is a problem that the British pluralists also grappled with. Harold Laski, in particular, questioned the Rousseauian picture of popular sovereignty, suggesting instead that a “practical” theory of popular sovereignty should be centered on a plurality of wills.<sup>12</sup> Laski was skeptical of the “prophetic announcements” attributed to one political will—what he characterized as a “political metaphysic.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, as the modern history of democracy demonstrates, the “fiction” of one people exercising its collective will has been central to the rise of popular sovereignty as a political and constitutional ideal.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding its anti-democratic potentials, the framework of collective will, as David Scott has argued, bears the promise of “political change,” especially the power to authorize new political beginnings.<sup>15</sup> Owing, in part, to his organicist commitments, the alternative sources of sovereignty that Mukerjee articulated proved to be inadequate to securing popular authorization for the transition to a postcolonial federation. In contrast, C.R. Das sought to fashion a theory of popular sovereignty that simultaneously affirmed the many-willed picture of the people and a dynamic collective will capable of exercising sovereignty. In this project, Das found common ground with the American progressive thinker Mary Parker Follett’s critique of British pluralism, especially

---

<sup>12</sup> The classic critique of Laski’s concept of sovereignty is Carl Schmitt’s. Schmitt faulted Laski for not being able to address how the exceptional decisions concerning the “friend-enemy grouping” would be adjudicated if sovereignty is pluralized. Laski’s assumption of a stark opposition between plural and monist concepts of sovereignty, as we shall see later in the paper, also generated direct or indirect criticism from Mary Parker Follett and C.R. Das. See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Laski, “The Theory of Popular Sovereignty,” *Michigan Law Review* 17, no. (3): 201-15.

<sup>14</sup> See, in particular, Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> See David Scott, “‘The Word is Love’: Michael Manley’s Style of Radical Political Will,” *Small Axe* 23, no. 1 (2019): 1691-86.

her attempt to reconcile the “one” and the “many” wills of the people through a process of gradual integration. Das’s struggle to overcome the dilemma of pluralist federalism, however, would be punctuated by his own political reversal of the temporal order between the many and the one. The chapter concludes by suggesting that Das’s grappling with the problem of collective will reveals the political dilemma that ultimately undercut the anticolonial career of pluralist federalism.

### **Pathways of Peoplehood: Critique of “Unilinear” Development and the Turn to Federalism**

Brajendranath Seal was invited as an Indian representative at the Universal Races Congress of 1911 in London. The Races Congress was a watershed moment in the international history of anticolonial resistance. One of the first international forums of its kind, the Congress brought together delegates from across the world.<sup>16</sup> B.N. Seal delivered the first keynote address of the Congress, following Du Bois’ recitation of “Hymn to the Peoples.”<sup>17</sup> Seal’s paper—“Meaning of Race, Tribe, Nation”—began with the bold claim that the “concourse and conflict of Nationalities and Empire” has become too “complex” for both the “analytical methods of Aristotelian or Machiavellian politics” and the “so-called Historical Schools of Montesquieu and

---

<sup>16</sup> Though some accounts imply that Gandhi was in attendance, he, in fact, was based in South Africa at the time. However, Gandhi’s newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, offered a detailed coverage of the event. Seal’s “most scholarly” and “highly technical” paper was favorably mentioned. *The Indian Opinion* coverage singled out Du Bois and offered a laudatory account of his speech. “The First Universal Races Congress [Special to Indian Opinion],” *The Indian Opinion*, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1911, 350.

<sup>17</sup> For an account of Du Bois’ participation at the Races Congress, see Elliott M. Rudwick, “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Universal Races Congress of 1911,” *Phylon Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1959): 372-378.

Vico.”<sup>18</sup> The study of nations and empires—and their origins and development—should instead account for “dynamic” and “fluent” notions of race and nation. This aspect of Seal’s argument strikingly paralleled Franz Boas’ paper in the next session of the Congress.<sup>19</sup> Seal’s turn to a plastic concept of groups was not simply about condemning essentialist views of race. His larger aim was to formulate a concept of “national personality,” integrating a people’s evolutionary, social, and cultural histories. The national personality evolves through realizations of its “ideal ends,” which emerge out of creative interaction with the “natural” and “social” environments.<sup>20</sup> The centralized state is a moment in the development process. As the process of decentralization advances, the state ceases to operate as a centralizing entity and transforms into an abstract “regulative ideal.” Contra Hegel, the state, however, is not the end of development. If all nations realize their “ideal ends,” the result would not be an exclusivist polity but rather a “divine event”—a “Universal Humanity.”<sup>21</sup> Seal termed this union between different peoples as “federationism.”

The dense arguments that Seal presented at the Races Congress were a culmination of two-decade-long reflections on the problem of development, especially of the Hegelian variant. Brajendranath Seal’s encounter with Hegel would have lasting consequences for Indian federalist thought. A professor of philosophy at the University of Calcutta, Seal was legendary for the breadth of his polymathic expertise. Though Seal published only sporadically, the range of his work spans from political philosophy to art history. Seal had been deeply intrigued by the

---

<sup>18</sup> Brajendranath Seal, “Meaning of Race, Tribe, Nation,” in *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems Communicated to the First Universal Races Congress*, ed. G. Spiller (London: P.S. King & Son, 1911), 1

<sup>19</sup> See Franz Boas, “The Instability of Human Types” in *ibid.*, 99-103.

<sup>20</sup> Seal, “Meaning of Race, Tribe, Nation,” 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

standards and methods of civilizational comparison. Is the pathway of Europe the only road to progress? This question preoccupied him since the 1890s. He soon grew critical of the assumption that development takes place in a linear series where each civilization could be compared and organized in an ascending series. Seal characterized this approach as the “unilinear” theory of development.<sup>22</sup>

The approach to civilizational difference through the development framework—where non-European concepts and ideas are treated as “backward” in contrast to their “advanced” European counterparts—struck Seal as fundamentally misleading. The “historico-comparative” method, Seal wrote in 1899, has been dominated by the assumption that “all other race and cultures have been a preparation for the Greco-Roman-Gothic type, which is now the epitome of Mankind.”<sup>23</sup> Seal mounted a critique of both the “unhistorical” evolutionism of Herbert Spencer and flawed historicism of the Hegelian philosophy of history. Thoroughly unimpressed by Spencer, Seal found the historical scope of the Spencerian teleology of “the military-industrial regime” to be singularly devoid of nuance, a philosophy of “unreal simplicity.” The Hegelian school fares better in its grasp of the dynamic process of development. Its defect—no less “reckless”—lay in the desire to derive “abstract and arbitrary standard...from the history of European civilization.”<sup>24</sup> The main challenge of the “historico-comparative method” was to overcome the “linear view of development.”<sup>25</sup> Taking a cue from Darwin’s contribution to evolutionary sciences, Seal proposed that the “historico-comparative” method should start from a multi-linear and plural vision of development. The project of rescuing the world from its

---

<sup>22</sup> Brajendranath Seal, *New Essays in Criticism* (Calcutta: Som Brothers, 1903), i.

<sup>23</sup> See Brajendranath Seal, *Comparative studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity and an Introduction on the Historico-Comparative Method* (Calcutta: Hare Press, 1899), i.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, iii-iv.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

reduction into “mere European side-views of humanity” hinged on this renewed conceptualization of the developmental process.<sup>26</sup>

In the introduction to a series of essays written in the 1890s, Seal returned to the Hegelian philosophy of world history. “In tracing the historic world-process,” Seal argued, the “genealogical line breaks up more and more into a network of relationship.” At whatever point we begin, and whether we go forward or backward, the developmental approach fails to account for global difference. Seal went on to conclude that the “Hegelian conception of a punctual movement in a unilinear series is as obsolete from the standpoint of philosophy of history and the historic method proper, as the Lamarckian view in the domain of biology.”<sup>27</sup> To render the world classifiable, Hegel extracted reigning “ideas” of the geographical-racial sites of the world and placed them in a successive order. For Seal, this was the philosophical distillation of the cruder discourse of civilizational hierarchy that followed in the wake of the modern colonial encounter. Comparative philosophy, once made “subsidiary” to developmentalism, transforms “networks” into straight lines.<sup>28</sup> If different civilizations are to be compared, comparative philosophy must approach each civilization as a “whole.”

For Seal, this Hegelian translation of the universal in terms of world history was ultimately reliant on the proximity assumed between the Absolute Idea and the so-called highest stage of development (i.e., Europe).<sup>29</sup> He instead proposed that the access to the universal is not

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>27</sup> Seal, *Essays*, ii.

<sup>28</sup> While comparative approaches were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century (Henry Maine and Max Müller being two of the most prominent figures in the British Indian context), Seal was one of the first thinkers (globally) to focus on the comparative studies of ideas. See Wilhelm Halbfass, “India and the Comparative Method,” *Philosophy East and West* 35, no. 1 (1985): 3-15.

<sup>29</sup> Seal, *Essays*, 18-19.

determined by the historical stage inhabited by a particular people. Contra Hegel, the universal is not to be “figured as the crest of an advancing wave, and leaving all behind a dead level.” It is rather “immanent” everywhere and at every moment.<sup>30</sup> If each developmental schema is understood on its own intrinsic terms, the plural conceptions of development would make it possible to see the capacity of any people to participate in the universal. However, no particular people can ever fully embody the universal; only the respective self-realization of the peoples of the world could ultimately enact universal humanity. This is how Seal re-purposes the developmental logic of Hegel’s philosophy of history. His break with Hegel concerned the question of whether development happens in a linear form and whether the state of being “backward” deprives a stage from the ability to summon the universal. Seal, however, did not give up on the framework of development altogether. Replacing the state with universal humanity, he argued for a plural and immanent account of the universal. Thus, for universal humanity to arrive, each people must be allowed to realize themselves, in a dialectical exchange with others but not at the expense of losing their specificity.

Seal drew out the political implication of this long-standing critique of unilinear development at the Races Congress. What he had earlier called “universal humanity” now acquired a more concrete institutional form—a global federation constituted by distinct and yet “networked” peoples of the world. The First World War further deepened Seal’s commitment. Writing to William Rothenstein in 1916, Seal noted that the War has been “supreme solvent, a merciless test, of all the values, social, political, spiritual, which you [Europeans] have standardized and made current in the West.”<sup>31</sup> Hinting at the problems generated by the nation-

---

<sup>30</sup> Seal, *Comparative Studies*, v-vi.

<sup>31</sup> B.N. Seal to W. Rothenstein, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1916, British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, MSS EUR/B/213/42. For a brief discussion of the Seal-Rothenstein exchanges,

state-based organization of European “national” and “international” life, Seal hoped the “still small voice” of India and China—and their alternative understanding of “social and national values”—would finally receive the attention it deserved. He prophesied that unless Europe revises its “scheme of life... and values,” the pursuit of peace is going to be no better than an “apocalyptic fire.”<sup>32</sup> The experiment of the League of Nations only emboldened Seal’s critique of the international order. In his presidential speech at the inauguration of Rabindranath Tagore’s Visvabharati University in 1921, Seal focused exclusively on the problems of territorial sovereignty. Seal’s idea of “national personality,” as I noted earlier, refers to a people’s historical trajectory of development. He thus found the territorial notion of sovereignty to be in profound tension with local practices of self-rule. Taking the First World War as a natural conclusion of the territorial and monist conception of sovereignty, Seal suggested that the League of Nations should revise its “definition of nationality.” The question of federalism directly hinged on this issue: “If the Federation of the World is to be established, we must raise the topic of extra-territorial nationality at the League of Nations.”<sup>33</sup>

Although Seal developed an account of pluralist federalism around the same time as his pluralist counterparts in Europe (and there is no direct engagement with them in his work), the affinity between Seal and the European pluralists did not go unnoticed. Benoy Kumar Sarkar—a student of Seal’s, who himself explored a few federalist themes—observed that Seal “drank from

---

see Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 186-7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Brajendranath Seal, “Visvabharati Parishad-Sabhar Pratishtha-Utsabe Sabhapatir Abhibhasan,” [Presidential Address at the Celebration of the Founding of the Council of Visvabharata University] in *Bangla Rachana* (Kolkata: Patralekha, 2013), 38-39 [Bengali, my translation].

the same [pluralist] cup as the German Gierke, French Duguit, and English Figgis.”<sup>34</sup> Seal acted as an intellectual linchpin in the “era of Bengal Revolution” (1905-1913), a term that Sarkar coined to refer to the explosion of intellectual and political activities in the Swadeshi and post-Swadeshi period.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Seal’s federalist influence—enabled no doubt by the limits of the monist conception of sovereignty revealed by the First World War—soon began to be manifested among a number of his students and political associates. The legacy of Seal’s conceptualization of federalism—as we shall see in the next two sections—would lie in the foregrounding of the critique of unilinear developmentalism.

The first notable exploration of the political implication of Seal’s theory came from none other than Bipin Chandra Pal, who was one of the champions of the new age of anticolonial nationalism in the prior decade. Pal was a close friend of Seal and was well-acquainted with his thoughts on Eurocentric developmentalism. It was, however, only after the end of the Swadeshi Movement that Pal took an active interest in the political implication of Seal’s project. Having virtually retired from politics, Pal traveled through Europe and grew wary of the national conflicts in Europe on the eve of the First World War. Upon his return to India, he published a collection of essays called *Nationality and Empire* (1916), the first book-length statement on federalism in colonial India. Drawing on Seal, Bipin Chandra Pal advanced the project of

---

<sup>34</sup> Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Benoy Sarkarer Baithake*, [In the Salon of Benoy Sarkar] vol. 1 (Kolkata: Chakrabarty, Chatterjee & Co. Ltd., 1944), 66. [Bengali; my translation].

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. A complex thinker in his own right, Sarkar operated as a globally itinerant intellectual in the decade following the First World War. Sarkar played a pioneering role in introducing American political theorists to Indian political thought. Of note here are the two articles he published in the *American Political Science Review*: Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “Hindu Theory of International Relations,” *American Political Science Review* 13, no. 3 (1919): 400-414; “Democratic Ideals and Republican Institutions in India,” *American Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (1918): 581-606.

remaking the “Empire-Idea” as a federalist “synthesis.” The federated union of peoples would simultaneously retain the specificity of each nation and yet transcend the limits of the “Nation-Idea.” Pal focused more on the nature of the universal polity than on the specifics of the multiple trajectories of development. Paraphrasing Seal, Pal argued

“Universal Humanity...is not to be figured as the crest of advancing wave occupying but one place at any moment and leaving all behind a dead level. Universal Humanity is immanent everywhere and at every moment...generally present in each race consciousness though each race may not have reflected the perfect type or pattern...The ideal of Humanity is not completely unfolded in any for each race potentially contains the fullness of the ideal but actually renders a few phases only...”<sup>36</sup>

Pal’s celebration of the “Federal-Idea,” which he distinguished from the “Empire-Idea,” registered a deep dissatisfaction with the normative implication of “isolated independent sovereignty.” Unlike Seal, Pal also closely considered the possibility of transforming the existing British Empire into a federation of free and equal nations. The irony of the “high priest of nationalism” (as Aurobindo Ghose famously christened him) turning to federalism was not lost on Pal. He defended his earlier affirmation of nationalism as a necessary step toward realizing federalism. The former is a stepping stone of the latter and proclaiming it before the national spirit formed would be nothing short of “suicidal.”<sup>37</sup> It should be noted, however, that Pal, in spite of his enthusiasm for the universal polity, remained fundamentally suspicious of the likelihood of transforming the racial order of empire into an equal enterprise of “mutual cooperation.” Following Seal, Pal too critiqued the territorial conception of sovereignty. But, the

---

<sup>36</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal, *Nationality and Empire: A Running Study of Some Current Indian Problems* (Calcutta: Thacker Spink & Co., 1916), 20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

question of how popular sovereignty is to be instituted in an extra-territorial form remained unanswered.

### **Radhakamal Mukerjee and the Anticolonial History of Pluralism**

This critique of unilinear developmentalism paved the way for reconsidering the historical course of non-European political development. It was Radhakamal Mukerjee who took up the project of reconstructing the logic of institutional development specific to the “East.” Drawing from Seal’s “historico-comparative method,” Mukerjee attempted to write what might be called a comparative history of pluralism. Mukerjee was a student of Seal and was profoundly influenced by his approach to comparative analysis. As Mukerjee notes in his autobiography, Seal “challenged the Hegelian unilinear view of the evolution of mankind and its institutions... It was this synthetic and comparative view which governs my comparative study of economic and political institutions.”<sup>38</sup> Mukerjee began to explore these issues in the mammoth *Foundations of Indian Economics* (1916), followed by the two-volume *Principles of Comparative Economics* (1921-22). The pinnacle of Mukerjee’s study of comparative pluralism, however, was the 1923 text *Democracies of the East: A Study in Comparative Politics*.

Like Seal, Mukerjee singled out Hegel as the greatest advocate of unilinear developmentalism.<sup>39</sup> According to Mukerjee, Hegel’s strong emphasis on the state had much to do with a German lack of unified statehood.<sup>40</sup> Yet the Hegelian projection of the state as the embodiment of reason ultimately reflected the inherent tendency of a particular tradition, the

---

<sup>38</sup> Radhakamal Mukerjee, *India, the Dawn of a New Era: An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Radha Publications, 1997), 88.

<sup>39</sup> Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Principles of Comparative Economics*, vol. 2 (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1922), 57.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

“Romano-Gothic” civilization. Mukerjee thus not only questioned the philosophical ground of Hegel’s historicism, but also aspired to particularize the universality of its norms. The latter move was crucial to the project of pluralizing the developmental trajectories of the world—what Mukerjee termed a “multilinear” theory of development.<sup>41</sup> This is also what constituted Mukerjee’s break with the comparative approach developed by nineteenth-century colonial historians and jurists, most notably Henry Maine. Unlike the Mills and other imperial liberals, Maine was critical of a direct transposition of the norms of “advanced” European societies on India.<sup>42</sup> But despite his sensitivity toward the treatment of native societies, Maine ultimately did not question the unilinear theory of development. For Mukerjee, Maine’s conceptualization of societal differences through the temporal scale of forwardness and backwardness was equally immersed in the unilinear theory of development: “The one path of human evolution which Maine chalked out ran from status to contract. The process to contract, which was readily assumed as universal, was superimposed upon a communal organization of life by an individualistic law, and disruptive tendencies let loose by the weakening of communal bonds were hailed as the travails of progress.”<sup>43</sup> This sharp critique of Maine reveals another major aim of Mukerjee’s argument: to break away once and for all from the nineteenth-century orientalist literature on village communities. Nevertheless, as Karuna Mantena has pointed out, Maine’s writings on the village community were an important resource for Mukerjee.<sup>44</sup> While indebted to Maine’s work, Mukerjee was opposed to both the developmental assumption and normative

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>42</sup> On Maine and the question of the native society, see Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberalism Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Mukerjee, *Democracies*, 297.

<sup>44</sup> See Karuna Mantena, “On Gandhi’s Critique of the State: Sources, Contexts, Conjectures,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9, no. 3 (2012): 535-563.

orientation of Maine's account of the village community. Against Maine, Mukerjee thus argued that the point of the village communities was not that the "primitive" organizations "still reigned supreme" in India; it was rather an embodiment of an altogether distinct developmental process whose normative possibility transcended the duality of "status" and "contract."<sup>45</sup>

This idealized account of the village republic would be at the center of Mukerjee's attempt to articulate an extra-territorial account of popular sovereignty. Outside of the dualism of the state and the individual, the "pluralism of groups" marked the constitutively decentralized form of Eastern politics. These groups—functional, occupational, and neighborhood-based—are overlapping and "organic." While not opposed to territorial groups, Mukerjee maintains that territory will not be the organizing principle of the "coming polity."<sup>46</sup> If the modern European functional groups were constituted through "sovereign fiats" that bestow them with personhood, the Eastern groups grew independently of any centralized authority and required no external authorization for its self-government.<sup>47</sup> Crucially, for Mukerjee, economic interests are not the sole marker of groupness in India, Japan, and China; interest groups were one among multiple forms of groups and enjoyed no special privilege over other forms of associations.

The turn to the federalist model emerged directly out of this picture of the village republic. While self-sufficient in their formation, village communities were not self-enclosed; and it was federalism that allowed for this union of autonomous political groups. Historically, village communities in the East formed a union of villages where the "principles of functional and territorial representation were fused."<sup>48</sup> The basis of such federation concerned matters that

---

<sup>45</sup> Mukerjee, *Democracies*, 296-7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

only affected several groups collectively, e.g., protection from invasion, founding new towns, and levying import duties. In stressing the historical presence of federalist arrangements in the East, Mukerjee was also arguing against the dominant form of oriental scholarship that only documented the primacy of “autonomous villages.”<sup>49</sup> The primary function of the federal state is co-ordination and co-operation, marked by its attention to “the delimitation of function and authority as between the central organ of the government and the various particulate local and communal bodies.”<sup>50</sup> The federal state, therefore, would presuppose the equality and prior sovereign rights of groups. The principle of representation would be fundamentally dispensed with, save the central body where proportional representation could be allowed. More fundamentally, questioning the traditional understanding of government, Mukerjee argues that the form of rule should not be defined on the basis of who occupies the seat of authority (one individual, few, or the many). It should instead be determined on the basis of how the functions of the government are distributed and, crucially, the “gradation in point of authority of such functions and their organs.”<sup>51</sup> Mukerjee argues that the intermingling of diverse elements and groups would result in an intersecting, rather than hierarchical, circles of authority.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 10. The conceptualization of local self-rule as a “concentric circle” rather than “hierarchical” order was common to all three federalists I consider here. This idea would find its most famous expression in Gandhi’s characterization of the village republic as an “oceanic circle” as opposed to a pyramidal structure in the 1940s. However, Gandhi’s strong commitment to moral self-rule of individual actors meant that he steered clear of pluralist federalism. See M.K. Gandhi, “Independence,” in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* vol. 91 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India), 325-7.

The question of caste particularly troubled this otherwise neat pluralist re-signification of Indian village communities.<sup>53</sup> Critical of the orientalist literature on the static and rigid nature of Indian caste, Mukerjee emphasized the dynamic constitution of caste groups. “There is,” Mukerjee argues, “no truth in the ill-informed but common criticism that caste from its very nature is opposed to self-government.”<sup>54</sup> He instead tried to show that most caste groups are autonomous and integrated into the democratic arrangements of village federalism. He acknowledges that the “untouchables” are oppressed by “specious doctrines,” but whether federalism is enough of an answer to the problem remains unexamined.<sup>55</sup> Mukerjee later developed a “plastic” theory of caste, arguing that economic and other forms of social transformations re-make the order of caste groups.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Mukerjee’s account fell short of addressing the relationship of domination that would exist between otherwise autonomous caste groups in a federalist polity.<sup>57</sup>

Spurred by the new school of pluralist thought flourishing in Britain and elsewhere, Mukerjee aimed to offer a distinctively “Eastern” answer to the crisis of the monist theory of

---

<sup>53</sup> One of the few studies of Indian pluralism and the question of caste, Ronald Inden’s *Imagining India* ignores Mukerjee. Inden focuses instead on Mukerjee’s elder brother—Radhakumud—who was a scholar of ancient India. Radhakumud was also influenced by Seal and British pluralism. His commitment to pluralism, however, was weak and often veered close to Hindu essentialism—or what Inden calls a form of “religious monism.” See Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 194-5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 274 (check edition)

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 347. On the participation of the “untouchables” in the village government, see also *ibid.* 274.

<sup>56</sup> See, in particular, Radhakamal Mukerjee, “Caste and Social Change in India,” *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 3 (1937): 377-390.

<sup>57</sup> For a critique of village self-government on the ground of its casteism and parochialism, see B.R. Ambedkar, “On Village Panchayat Bill,” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol. 2, ed. V. Moon (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014), 104–122.

sovereignty. Mukerjee’s international focus—bringing together India, China, Japan, and the Middle East—was distinctive to anticolonial federalism. Still, the imprint of British pluralism on his work is apparent; he self-consciously organized his arguments under the conceptual rubrics of monist and pluralist theories of sovereignty. For all the proximity to British pluralism, Mukerjee was anxious to demarcate his project from his European counterparts. Addressing Laski and Cole directly, Mukerjee argued that the British pluralist understanding of groups was mechanical and disconnected from the “organic” dimension of collective life. Mukerjee identified two conjoined “fallacies” in European pluralism: a re-entrenched individualism and a mechanical “sectionalism.” There had been a renewal in pluralist thought— Mukerjee notes without citing any particular pluralist author—of “abstract morality with its inevitable individualism.” Mukerjee most likely had Laski’s affirmation of the impenetrable individual in mind.<sup>58</sup> As Marc Stears has shown, Laski (and Cole) began to re-assert a version of individualism in the early 1920s following their dispute with the older, especially Figgisian, pluralists.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, sectionalism—especially Cole’s guild socialism—failed, in Mukerjee’s telling, to account for the “vital modes of association” that constitute the life of the community.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, Eastern groups are undergirded by both “functional and organic solidarity”; the reality of “social interdependence” is already constitutive of village communities.<sup>61</sup> The norms of pluralism, in other words, are inherent to the developmental trajectory of Eastern political life. In his organicist signification of pluralism, Mukerjee’s argument, one might reasonably conclude, was closer to the German jurist Otto von Gierke.

---

<sup>58</sup> Harold Laski, *Authority in the Modern State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), 65-66.

<sup>59</sup> Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problem of the State*, 100.

<sup>60</sup> Mukerjee, *Democracie*, 345.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 350-51.

This, however, poses an interpretative conundrum. British pluralism famously began its intellectual project with the partial English translation of Gierke's *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht* by the legal historian F.W. Maitland.<sup>62</sup> Maitland's interpretation of Gierke underplayed the organicist basis of his theory of *Genossenschaftsrecht* (fellowship), prioritizing instead the critical implication of Gierke's theory of "real" group personality for the state-centric concept of sovereignty.<sup>63</sup> In fact, British pluralist theories of association had been suspicious of organicist thought from the beginning, not least because of the identification of the monist theory of sovereignty with a Hegel-inspired organicist statism in Britain. The British Idealist account of Hegel—culminating with the publication of Bernard Bosanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1899)—centralized the organicist dimension of his political philosophy. While Bosanquet was open to acknowledging the importance of groups and associations, the state—he contended in a Hegelian vein—is a unified higher entity that subsumes "all the elements of a people's life...in it as an indivisible unity."<sup>64</sup> The organicism of the British Idealists was initially tethered to the Hegelian concept of ethical life or *Sittlichkeit*; though, as Jeanne Morefield argues, their eventual turn to biological accounts of organicism would destabilize the Hegelian

---

<sup>62</sup> Otto von Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, trans. F.W. Maitland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900).

<sup>63</sup> On the undermining of the organicist and Hegelian elements of Gierke's thought in England, see David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54-85; Charles Turner, "Organicism, Pluralism and Civil Association: Some Neglected Political Thinkers," *History of the Human Sciences* 5, no. 3: 175-84.

<sup>64</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1965), 264. G.D.H. Cole calls Bosanquet's text an "awful" example of a metaphysical interpretation of the state. Harold Laski and Ernest Barker also shared similar opinions. Laski found Bosanquet's concern with the "unity inherent in the social fabric" fundamentally unaware of social "disharmonies." See, Paul Hirst, ed., *The Pluralist Theory of the State: Selected Writings of G.D.H. Cole, J.N. Figgis and H.J. Laski* (London: Routledge, 1989), 81, 183. For Laski's critique, see Laski, "Theory of Popular Sovereignty," 207-8.

commitment.<sup>65</sup> Given this status of Hegelianism in England, the pluralists considered the organicist approach to associations to be embroiled in the problem of statism, and generally preferred a voluntarist notion of group-formation.

From the textual evidence of *Democracies of the East*, it appears that Mukerjee was familiar with Gierke only through the Maitland translation.<sup>66</sup> Yet, much in the vein of Gierke, Mukerjee preferred a “plurality-in-unity” (as opposed to “unity-in-plurality”) approach to conceptualizing groups, where the wholeness of the group comes before its parts.<sup>67</sup> His claim that local self-rule taps into the vital and communal elements organic to the East and realizes its inherent possibilities, also has a Gierkean dimension. Gierke’s theory of groups, of course, was steeped in Hegelian language, and he also shared the philosopher’s world-historical characterization of Germanic peoples.<sup>68</sup> J.N. Figgis—the most organicist of the British pluralists—also made a case for prioritizing the “life” of groups over “law.”<sup>69</sup> But there was no explicit developmental historicism *a la* Gierke in Figgis. While Mukerjee did not share Gierke’s celebration of the Germanic tradition, his organicist approach to groups was closer to Gierke than the British pluralists or their Idealist rivals. However, given his inadequate knowledge of

---

<sup>65</sup> See Jeanne Morefield, “Hegelian Organicism, British New Liberalism and the Return of the Family State,” *History of Political Thought* 33, no. 1 (2002): 141-170.

<sup>66</sup> Mukerjee only refers to Gierke twice in the text (in the same paragraph). On both occasions, he groups Maitland and Gierke together as exponents of “group theory of rights.” In the following sentence, he again implies that Maitland and Figgis in England and Gierke in Germany were advancing the same project. *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>67</sup> See Otto von Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*, vol. 1, trans. Ernest Barker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 35-92.

<sup>68</sup> See Otto von Gierke, *Community in Historical Perspective*, ed. Antony Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 116-7.

<sup>69</sup> On Figgis’ model of “organic co-ordination (as opposed to later pluralist such as Cole and Laski’s “contractual integration”), see Cécile Laborde, *Pluralist Thought and the State in Britain and France 1900-1925* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 45-68.

Gierke, it seems quite plausible that Mukerjee independently worked out similar arguments with the help of a different Hegelian influence, i.e., Seal's pluralist reinvention of the discourse of development. Gierke's "organism" was primarily concerned with the holistic nature of Germanic societies, whereas Mukerjee was more invested in the "multilinear" schemes of development suggested by post-Darwinian evolutionary organicism.<sup>70</sup> This is not all. Unlike Gierke, and echoing Seal, Mukerjee posited universal humanity, not the Gierkean-Hegelian *Rechtsstaat*, as the ultimate realization of the multilinear lines of development. For Mukerjee, the monist theory of sovereignty posed a two-fold problem: the misrecognition of the nature of sovereignty and the universalization of the particularity of European history as a norm. While Mukerjee was in broad agreement with the pluralists with regard to the problem of monist sovereignty, he also demanded from them an indictment of their own tradition. Insofar as the "Romano-Gothic" trajectory of development is inherently imperial, its "organic" limitations must first be recognized if Europe hopes to overcome its statism. To this extent, Mukerjee's multilinear theory of development also aspired to reverse the hierarchy that was once assumed between Western statehood and Eastern localism.

Mukerjee's project, notwithstanding its polemical attempt to reverse the civilizational schema of nineteenth-century European political thought, was ultimately an attempt to offer another narrative of popular sovereignty. This other time of peoplehood was a temporal scheme where Asian and global federalism was the ultimate end, as opposed to the unified state and parliamentary democracy. Mukerjee took this "Eastern" turn to pluralism to be a simultaneous

---

<sup>70</sup> On Gierke's "organism," see Gierke, *Political Theory of the Middle Age*, 22-30. For an account of the uses of Darwinian evolutionary organicism in early twentieth-century Indian thought, see Inder Marwah, "Provincializing Progress: Developmentalism and Anti-Imperialism in Colonial India," *Polity* 51, no. 3 (2019): 498-531.

rejection of colonialism and the narrative of development that helped sustain it. For Mukerjee, the ideals of popular sovereignty—one, united, and “fit” peoplehood—were all imbricated in the unilinear theory of development. Once separated from this paradigm, the people could be diverse, scattered and localized, yet sovereign in their exercise of political power as small groups. In particular, Mukerjee’s account of communal-federal democracy had a direct implication for the majority-minority question. The tendency of popular sovereignty (of the representative democracy variant) to devolve into majoritarianism was a well-recognized problem by the mid-nineteenth century. There was, however, another dimension to this problem in the colonial world. The justification of colonial rule was predicated on the claim that India was not fit to rule over itself both for its historical backwardness and national disunity. The spatial division of India across regions and religions redoubled as the manifestation of its historical backwardness, thus foregrounding the necessity of political growth under colonial rule. The immediate upshot of abandoning the ideal of unified peoplehood consisted in not considering the lack of unity as a substantive impediment toward the institution of anticolonial democracy. In the small scale of self-rule, the burden of unity would dissolve in the autonomy bestowed upon each political group, rendering the nationally-conceived notions of the majority and minority groups superfluous. Although Mukerjee, in a polemical vein, calls this other vision of peoplehood an embodiment of the “real will” of the people, the framework of collective will plays no meaningful role in his vision of democracy.<sup>71</sup> If India were to be left to its own devices, Mukerjee concluded, the “natural development” would be toward “a people’s state, communal in its lower stratifications, and democratic and federal in its organization.”<sup>72</sup> Yet Mukerjee’s work

---

<sup>71</sup> Mukerjee, *Democracies*, xii.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

did not address the question of the transition to postcolonial federalism. As in the question of caste, his organicist approach to groups remained in tension with a dynamic and transformative conception of sovereignty. If the people in reality were comprised of a plurality of wills, what form might an anticolonial movement of “many peoples” take? I trace this problem in the next section.

### **Collective Will and the Dilemma of Anticolonial Federalism**

Mukerjee’s distant companion in the federalist project, Chittaranjan Das—a major figure of the anticolonial movement in the 1910s and 1920s—confronted the problem of collective will directly amid the urgency of anticolonial resistance. C.R. Das, as he was commonly known, was a lawyer-turned-politician who rose to political fame in the late 1910s and earned the honorific *deshabandhu* (friend of the nation). As a Congress politician, the Deshabandhu’s influence was perhaps only second to Gandhi in the early 1920s.<sup>73</sup> Das’s turn to federalism took place independently and in parallel with Mukerjee’s; he knew Bipin Chandra Pal’s work well and was personally familiar with B.N. Seal. While the federalist project was flourishing among Indian academics in the post-WWI era, the anticolonial movement itself remained tethered to a set of demands centered on gradual reform and representative government. Das suggestively summed up the discursive predicament of this form of anticolonial politics in the celebrated address that facilitated his meteoric rise as an anticolonial politician:

What has been said so often—that the object of our politics will be to *build up* the Bengalees into a nation...I would not admit for one moment that Bengalees are wanting

---

<sup>73</sup> Benoy Kumar Sarkar—writing in 1928—noted that C.R. Das, together with Sun Yat-Sen of China and Zaghlul Pasha of Egypt, were three most important voices of the “Young Asia.” See, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “Chittaranjan Das and Young Asia,” in *The Political Philosophies since 1905* (Madras: B.G. Paul & Co., 1928), 333-273.

in humanity [see the note below]...I know that the Bengalee has a Culture and Philosophy of his own, that he has a Law and History, Philosophy and Literature of his own... But we may take it for granted that Bengalees have many faults which require to be corrected; and in that sense *we may concede for the sake of argument* that the Bengalee is deficient.”<sup>74</sup>

The ideal of centralized representative government, Das diagnosed, is complicit in deferring anticolonial sovereignty. Das thus argued that what is conventionally described as “politics”—the mere evocation of which “conjures up before our eyes the vision of English political institutions; and we feel tempted to fall down before and worship the precise form which Politics has assumed under the peculiar conditions of English history”<sup>75</sup>— must itself be re-examined.<sup>76</sup>

In this project, Das too found new political possibility in the critique of unilinear development. Much like Mukerjee, he incorporates the village-oriented theory of government within the larger scheme of multilinear development. He argues that swaraj or self-rule is more than a form of government”: “Swaraj...is not to be confused with any particular system of government...Swaraj begins when the true development of a nation begins.”<sup>77</sup> Whether it was representative or direct government, the definition of self-rule could not be deduced from the system of government. On the contrary, the unfolding of self-development, specific to each people, would determine the corresponding system of government. Swaraj was thus claimed to

---

<sup>74</sup> Das, “Bengal and the Bengalees,” 5 (emphasis added; translation modified). For the Bengali version, see Chittaranjan Das, *Deshabandhu Rachanasamagra* (Kolkata: Tuli-kalam, 1977), 14.

<sup>75</sup> C.R. Das, “Bengal and the Bengalees,” in *Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan: Brief Survey of Life and Work, Provincial Conference Speeches, Congress Speeches* (Calcutta: Rajen Sen, B.K. Sen, 1926), 8

<sup>76</sup> C.R. Das, *India for Indians* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1917), 41.

<sup>77</sup> Das, “Non-Cooperation and Council Entry,” in *Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan*, 195.

be a “relative notion.”<sup>78</sup> For the “genius” of the Indian people to realize itself, they would need to institute a system of government that grows out of their logic of self-development. For the same reason, swaraj could only be incompletely translated as self-rule since the connotation of hierarchical “rule” contradicts the former’s self-developing logic.<sup>79</sup>

The federalist arrangement proposed by Das was not simply a system of government; its meaning was equally determined by the counter-narrative it offered to the colonial teleology of parliamentary democracy. In spite of his regular protestations against the reduction of the question to that of a “system of government,” Das went on to offer a concrete institutional structure for the future government. In particular, the document submitted to the Gaya Congress of 1922, *Outline Schemes of Swaraj*, stands as a milestone in the Indian federalist tradition. In line with his predecessors, Das put the village community at the center of this institutional arrangement.<sup>80</sup> Even while Das took the prevalent historiography of the village republic for granted, the institutional forms given— and the roles assigned— to the village republic were rather innovative. As the primary unit of the government, the village center would have the power to make and execute laws, whereas the central state’s power would be exceptional and advisory. Within each village center, the judiciary, legislative, and the executive must be strictly separated. The relationship between village centers and the more central units would be non-hierarchical insofar as the latter would only seek to ensure co-ordination and mutual support among the primary units. Das specified two separate functions reserved for the government:

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>80</sup> C.R. Das, *Outline Schemes of Swaraj* (Kolkata: Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of West Bengal, 1973), 31.

protective and promotive.<sup>81</sup> The first conception of government—negative in its essence—is merely concerned with the prevention of crimes and adjustment of wrongs. The latter—positive and socialistic—prioritizes the “active promotion of the welfare of the community.”<sup>82</sup> This account of federalism constructed the people as dispersed localized bodies, to be gradually integrated into a larger collective form.

Das’s scheme of government—self-developing in its political ontology and federalist in its constitutional projection—stood at odds with the idea of sovereignty as the highest absolute power. Yet, as a political actor, Das was faced with the limits of merely appealing to the intrinsic drive of self-development in order to de-authorize imperial sovereignty. Mere recourse to the plural and dispersed account of peoplehood—many peoples—left the popular authorization of the anticolonial demand scattered. If the people are dispersed into many wills, how could their diffused collective sovereignty be invoked for the sake of de-authorizing empire? Unlike Mukerjee, Das thus equally emphasized the “dynamic” aim of pluralist federalism to “generate” a new collective will.<sup>83</sup> As we shall see, he sought to reconcile the many and the one by introducing a temporal order where the one people is generated by the democratic practices of many peoples.

---

<sup>81</sup> Das’ contemporaries did not overlook these two ideas of government. Prithwis Chandra Ray—one of Das’ first biographers—digressed into a lengthy discussion of the problem of government to situate C.R. Das’ political thought. Ray distinguished between two functions of government: the constituent part oriented to protection and the ministrant part concerned with development: “[the ministrant part] is undertaken not by governing but by way of advancing the general interest of society and assisting every social organization intended to promote the welfare of the body politic.” P.C. Ray, *The Life and Times of C.R. Das* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 96.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>83</sup> C.R. Das, *Freedom Through Disobedience* (Madras: Arka Publishing House, 1922), 41.

In this project of reconciling the many (peoples) with the one (people), Das was greatly aided by the work of the contemporary American thinker Mary Parker Follett.<sup>84</sup> Follett's *The New State* (1918) exerted significant influence in the American progressive era. Having studied with the British pluralists, Follett wrote her text partly as a critical advancement of the project in America. Follett shared the pluralist critique of centralized sovereignty, but she was critical of the discrete notion of groups proffered by her British counterparts. The very term "pluralism" was derived from William James' account of ontological pluralism (which Laski encountered during his time in America).<sup>85</sup> According to Follett, the British pluralists had fundamentally misunderstood the concept of pluralism. Their appropriation of American pragmatism was one-sided insofar as they failed to understand how groups interact and create something new in the process: "[The pluralists] talk of the Many and the One without analyzing the process by which the Many and the One are creating each other."<sup>86</sup> Not group in isolation, but "group in relation" should be the focus of political thought. If the latter is taken into account, Follett argued, it would appear that sovereignty of the one is not antithetical to the sovereignty of the many.<sup>87</sup> For Follett, there is no given "will of the people" that we could just "put into operation." The concept of the people should instead be understood as "the integration of every development, of every genius, with everything else that our complex and interacting life brings about."<sup>88</sup> In contrast to the

---

<sup>84</sup> To my knowledge, Das's is the only notable Indian appreciation of Follett's work in this period. Mukerjee's comprehensive (and more scholarly) text, *Democracies of the East*, does not cite Follett (though it mentions John Dewey).

<sup>85</sup> On William James' pluralism and the problem of empire, see Alexander Livingston, *Damn Great Empires!: William James and the Politics of Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>86</sup> Follett, *The New State*, 271.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-20.

British pluralists, Follett also reflected substantively on the international dimension of pluralism. The *New State* ends with a chapter on the “World State,” which suggests that that a global community of nations can only develop through the principle of the “group in relation.”<sup>89</sup> Paralleling the Indian federalists, she mounted a strong criticism of the League of Nations for instituting a centralized and territorial notion of sovereignty.

The arguments of Follett’s *The New State* had far-reaching consequences for Das’s own conceptualization of pluralist federalism.<sup>90</sup> Presenting a lengthy summary of Follett’s argument in his presidential address at the eventful Gaya Congress Session of 1922, Das lauded the “gifted authoress of *The New State*” and underscored the similarity between their visions of politics.<sup>91</sup> Reconstructing Follett’s arguments, Das contended that the central problem of traditional theories of sovereignty had been their reliance on the idea of the collective will as a process of addition as opposed to a process of integration. Hinting at the Rousseauian notion of the collective will, Das argued the process of “addition” to arrive at collective will is a deeply unsatisfactory approach. For Das, what Follett had “discovered” was the “detailed means and methods by which the different wills of a neighbourhood entity may grow into one common collective will.”<sup>92</sup> Such an assimilation of Follett’s argument helped Das to reconcile, however tentatively, the many and the one: the many peoples of village republics and the one people of

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 344-360.

<sup>90</sup> For contemporary appreciations of Follett’s text, see Marc Stears, *Progressives*, 146-67; Jane Mansbridge, “Mary Parker Follett: Feminist and Negotiator,” in *The New State*, xvii-xxviii.

<sup>91</sup> Das, “*Deshabandhu*,” 217-18. Das fell out with Gandhi at the Gaya Congress Session following a disagreement over the form of non-cooperation the platform should adopt. He went on to found the Swaraj Party (within the Congress) in 1923, which held significant sway over the anticolonial movement for the next couple of years.

<sup>92</sup> C.R Das, *Freedom Through Disobedience*, 41-43.

the nation. Collective will could only emerge after the gradual integration of many wills into one will; the one people, to this extent, was an *effect* of the democratic practices of many people.

The condition of the one was the many, yet the urgency of the anticolonial claim to sovereignty meant that the order could not be maintained. In one of the final speeches before his untimely death, Das resorted to a more familiar notion of popular sovereignty. Self-rule, he repeated, was not “any particular system of government.” But instead of merely characterizing it as “true development” and the “expression of national mind,” Das declared: “What I want today is a clear declaration *by* the people of this country that we have got the right to establish our own system of government according to the temper and genius of our own people.”<sup>93</sup> The reference to the “genius and temper” of the people concerned the federalist government supposedly intrinsic to the spirit of the Indian people. The call for a declaration of sovereignty *by the* people, however, took him back to the problem of the many and the one. This is a dilemma that Das encountered most profoundly in the aftermath of the Bengal Pact, a landmark event in the history of Indian anticolonial politics. Prior to the Pact, Bengal politics had grown increasingly acrimonious, destabilized by the conflict between socially dominant Hindus and Bengali Muslims emboldened by their numerical majority in the province. This division of the people along sectarian lines paved the way for the institution of separate electorates within the bound of limited franchise. Das’s response to this crisis was the Bengal Hindu-Muslim Pact, an arrangement that promised proportional distribution of legislative representation and administrative jobs and sought to bind the two communities through a shared commitment to not aggrieve each other’s religious sentiments. Insofar as the Pact targeted asymmetries in the central legislative body and throughout provincial administrative appointments, its objective did not

---

<sup>93</sup> Das, *Deshabandhu*, 274 (original emphasis).

amount to anything resembling the federalist account previously proposed by Das. Still, the fundamental impulse of the Pact emerged precisely out of his federalist inclinations: instead of affirming the given (or pursuing the future) real unity of the people, Das considered group autonomy no hindrance to democratic self-rule.

Thus, when Das was accused of pandering to the majority Muslims for political gains, he responded in unequivocal terms: “For the last five years I have been thinking of this great idea [of federalism]... and I have been pointing out that the only foundation for self-government is the federation of Hindus and Muhammadans.”<sup>94</sup> The Bengal Pact, Das maintained, was a “suggestion” made to the “whole people,” who would, upon the institution of self-rule, accept the federal arrangement as a constitutional principle. Prior to the end of colonial rule, no such arrangement could be meaningful given the presence of imperial sovereignty. Setting “the constitutional charter of the federation between the Hindus and the Muhammadans” as the goal, Indians should first collectively resist and bring colonial rule to an end. To institute dispersed federalist self-rule then Indians needed to act together for once: the “one people” collectively instituting a polity of many peoples. This was Das’s attempt to transform the alternative normative framework of pluralist popular sovereignty into a discourse of resistance. In Mukerjee’s as well his own account of pluralist federalism, sovereignty and (self-)government on a small scale were taken to be overlapping. As Das also understood, the potency of popular sovereignty as a discourse of resistance lies in its ability to summon authorization from a people who is one and prior to constituted power. That, however, meant that Das’s endeavor to reconcile between the many and the one through Follett’s model of “gradual integration” encountered an

---

<sup>94</sup> Bengal Legislative Council. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1924, 14, no.4: 86.

intractable dilemma. If collective will could only emerge through the exercise of local self-rule, the appeal to, and prioritization of, the one people undermined the conceptual and temporal order underlying the theory of gradual integration.

This was no theoretical laxity. Called upon to offer a popular life to anticolonial federalism, Das had to veer between the time of the one-and-undivided people and that of dispersed peoples. After all, the hallmark of modern popular sovereignty—constituent power—is predicated upon the conception of the people as one and willful. The claim of popular sovereignty, however incomplete and partial, derives its authorization in the name of *the* people. That the will of people could be invoked to authorize and de-authorize constituted political bodies follows from the picture of the people as a monist entity. Yet this picture of the people has also proved to be an impediment to the project of instituting self-rule. As Hannah Arendt memorably argued, the construction of the people as a collective will renders it in the mold of an individual: united, indivisible, and willful. Cannibalizing itself from within, the figuration of the people as a collective will results in a vision of popular sovereignty where the people “moves as one body and acts as though possessed by one will.”<sup>95</sup> The framework of collective will elevates politics to a space beyond political disputes, a self-evident body of truth that suppresses the worldly dimension of politics.<sup>96</sup>

As I have noted, the critique of the framework of collective will was shared by Euro-

---

<sup>95</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 70.

<sup>96</sup> For a critique of the framework of the will and for a reinterpretation of Arendt’s account, see Linda Zerilli, “From Willing to Judging: Arendt, Habermas, and the Question of ’68,” in *A Democratic Theory of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 184-207; For a critique of the “politics of the will” from the perspective of representative democracy, see Nadia Urbinati, *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 60-100; see also, Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 134-177.

American as well as anticolonial pluralists, even as their intellectual trajectories were not identical. The Indian federalists reached this conclusion through a critique of nineteenth-century political thought where the collective capacity to will was historicized and deployed in support of colonial rule. Sidestepping the necessity to wait for the emergence of a “developed” and undivided people, these federalist thinkers attempted to reconceptualize the people as a dispersed entity. Much before the arrival of independent statehood, they articulated a critique of the framework of collective will and its stifling of the practices of self-rule. The federalists wanted popular sovereignty to emerge out of the practice of self-rule, not the other way around. At the same time, they wanted to bring an end to imperial sovereignty so as to be able to institute pluralist self-rule. This is where the exit from the monist account of the people proved to be a dilemma-ridden affair. The urgency of summoning the popular de-authorization of empire reinforced the monist image of the people, even while the federalists normatively invested their hope in the figure of many peoples.

The emergence of the demand for independent nation-state—centered on the promise of a planned “rapid progress” in order to “catch up” with the advanced nations<sup>97</sup>—would soon put an end to this tradition of federalist thought in colonial India in the mid-1920s. As we shall see in the following chapter, the politics of collective will would be seized on more compellingly by non-federalist anticolonial thinkers such as Jawaharlal Nehru who had no embroilment in the problem of many peoples.<sup>98</sup> Still, the question of federalism would return to colonial India in the 1940s, especially with the rise of the demand for Muslim autonomy. Muslim minority concerns

---

<sup>97</sup> On the reconsolidation of the ideal of “rapid progress” led by an independent planning state, see Jawaharlal Nehru, “The Peasantry,” in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 3 (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972), 412-416.

<sup>98</sup> On Nehru’s critique of federalism as a “feudal” reaction, see Rama Sundari Mantena, “Anticolonialism and Federation in Colonial India,” *Ab Imperio* 3 (2018): 36-62.

about an assertive Hindu dominance both within the Indian National Congress and at the central legislative level were matched by the Congress leadership's dogged unwillingness to weaken its aspiration for a centralized planning state. The failure to find common grounds between these incommensurable demands paved the way to colonial India's partition, and the birth of two (India and Pakistan)—and later three (Bangladesh)—separate states where the numerical superiority of each community assumed the form of what Bipin Chandra Pal once called an "isolated independent sovereignty." Yet this dispute was far removed from earlier innovative visions of local self-rule and many peoples. The inevitability of a centralized "monist" sovereign state was assumed, and the dispute as a whole consequentially concerned its share. Other projects of anticolonial federalism, unfolding in Africa and the Caribbean in the post-War era, were in fact closer to the Indian precedent, for they interrogated the limits of the nation-state itself (though their preoccupation with economic development was more contemporaneous to the Indian concerns of the 1940s). Furthermore, the later iterations of anticolonial federalism in Africa and the Caribbean aspired to "nondomination in the international sphere" without giving up on national independence.<sup>99</sup> Seen in light of this body of federalist thought, the historiographical question regarding the place of the nation-state in the history of anticolonial thought loses much of the aura of incontestability. But it also shows how the theoretical instability of anticolonial federalism with regard to the question of popular sovereignty, despite its originality and richness, rendered its articulation of popular authorization too hesitant to compete with the discourse of centralized state sovereignty in the age of global self-determination.

---

<sup>99</sup> Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 139.

## Conclusion

Federalism went through a conceptual expansion in the twentieth century. The American revolutionary history of federalism—central to the modern history of the concept—had been marked by its commitment to the sovereignty of one national people, albeit within the limits of settler sovereignty.<sup>100</sup> In the interwar period, federalism emerged as a powerful avenue to reconsider popular sovereignty beyond the limits of undivided peoplehood and the nation-state. Reflecting on the political plight of European Jews, Arendt wrote in 1940 that “the only chance of all small peoples...lies in a new European federal system.” The “territorial” conception of the nation, she added, was undergoing a “crucial correction.”<sup>101</sup> Arendt observed that the British Empire reveals the “rudiments of a new arrangement” in a “distorted form”—for different peoples had been co-existing under the shared commonwealth without losing their nationality.<sup>102</sup> As recent scholarship has shown, Arendt’s prescient observation regarding the future of “small peoples” was shared by anticolonial thinkers across Asia and Africa. However, as Arendt was drawing hope from the fundamentally flawed example of the British Empire, the empire itself was entering into its final phase—giving in to the anticolonial demand for nation-states by the

---

<sup>100</sup> As Jason Frank has demonstrated, American federalists constantly invoked the one people to bypass the state sovereignty of the Anti-federalists. Jason Frank, *Publius and Political Imagination* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 25-46. On this point, see also Joshua Miller, “The Ghostly Body Politic: *The Federalist Papers* and Popular Sovereignty,” *Political Theory* 16, no. 1 (1988): 99-119. On the settler-colonial and racial foundations of federalist popular sovereignty in revolutionary and post-revolutionary America, see Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2018); Lawrie Balfour, “Reading Publius with Morrison and Melville,” *Polity* 47, no. 4 (2015): 550-557.

<sup>101</sup> Hannah Arendt, “The Minority Question” in *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 129-30.

<sup>102</sup> On Arendt’s federalism, see Gil Rubin, “From Federalism to Binationalism: Arendt’s Shifting Zionism,” *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 3 (2015): 393-414.

end of the decade. What was at stake was not the political expediency of transforming the British Empire into a democratic federal order. In fact, Indian anticolonial thinkers were keener to institute Asian federalism. The semblance of federalism in the British Empire, in other words, was only a semblance. The co-existence of plural national groups in the empire was predicated on a simultaneous denial and promise of peoplehood to the colonies, especially the non-white ones. The investment of the British Empire in a unilinear discourse of development normatively troubled any hope of reinventing it. That this group of anticolonial federalists could problematize not only the denial of peoplehood but also the promise itself is due to their profound critique of unilinear developmentalism.

The main challenge, as the federalists underscored, lay in reconciling local and dispersed self-rule with democratic norms ultimately grounded in the sovereignty of the people. The remarkable appeal of the nation-state in the twentieth century, after all, pertained to its expression of the principle of popular sovereignty in a bounded and unified image. Pushing the pluralist concept of sovereignty to its limit, the Indian anticolonial federalists pursued the difficult project of formulating an extra-territorial and many-willed concept of the people. Their theoretical reflections and political struggle productively revealed the deep entanglement of democratic authorization with the monist figure of the people, and the fraught space between the collective will and many wills. This dilemma of pluralizing popular sovereignty, as I have argued, was acutely revealed in the federalist thought of the colonial world. The value of this anticolonial federalist archive thus far surpasses the pragmatic and normative problems of the nation-state that it anticipated. What is often missing in the historiographical debate on anticolonial federalism is an appreciation of how anticolonial federalism interrogated the very conceptual ground of modern democracy from the vantage point of the colonial world. Moving

beyond formal or instrumentalist understandings of colonial rule, federalist thinkers explored how modern colonialism signified global differences in the form of a discourse of unilinear development. The political response, as they argued, should not just seek to bring an end to colonialism, but also must transform the temporal scheme within which the future of postcolonial democracy was located. Regardless of its dilemmas and unrealized political life, anticolonial federalist thought remains of enduring value both for theorizing the paradigmatic nature of colonialism as a form of rule and for understanding the theoretical challenges that shaped the anticolonial democratic project.

## Chapter 5

### **“Discovery” of the People: Postcolonial Founding and the Idea of Independence**

#### **Introduction**

Writing from the prison in the 1940s, Jawaharlal Nehru recounted a curious story from the days of his anticolonial activities in the Indian villages. As Nehru reached a political gathering, the crowd—composed of peasants—started chanting: “Bharat Mata ki Jai” (Victory to Mother India). Taking the stage, Nehru asked them: what exactly is this *Bharat Mata* [Mother India]? Bemused and surprised, the peasants looked at each other in search of an answer. After a long silence, one of them declared that the nation was *dharti* or the earth. Nehru followed up with more questions: “What earth? [Your] particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or in the whole of India?” Others joined in and speculated further, but to no avail. Nehru ultimately had to introduce *Bharat Mata* to itself: “*Bharat Mata*, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this *Bharat Mata*, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves *Bharat Mata*, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery.”<sup>1</sup>

This story from Nehru’s *Discovery of India*, published on the eve of the Indian independence, captured what would come to be the taken-for-granted account of postcolonial founding. As Rupert Emerson argued in the early 1960s, the convergence between nationalist and democratic aspirations had resulted in conferring of sovereignty on the largely “illiterate” peoples. First worked out in Europe, the democratic ideal slowly and incompletely was

---

<sup>1</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 60-61.

disseminated through colonization in the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup> Global historians of the idea of independence repeat another version of what might be called a framework of the belated universal. In trying to stitch together anticolonial independence with the originary event of the American Declaration of Independence, David Armitage finds the American Revolution—and its codification of the Vattelien model of independence—to be the source of the “contagion” that spread throughout the world later.<sup>3</sup> In another influential account of the rise of anticolonial self-determination, Erez Manela centralizes Woodrow Wilson’s affirmation of the national right to self-determination as the critical event that facilitated the anticolonial claim for independent statehood. The right to self-determination—hitherto enjoyed by dominant Euro-American nations—eventually found its anticolonial claimants after Wilson’s international authorization.<sup>4</sup> Even scholars critical of the derivative approach to anticolonial thought reinforce the premise of the belated universal. Partha Chatterjee, for example, argues that the “gradual lifting of the constraints of class, rank, gender, race, caste etc.” from “the idea of popular sovereignty” made it available to non-Europeans and helped institute nation-states premised on an “identity of the people with the nation.”<sup>5</sup>

By all accounts, the era of decolonization had been one of the most important developments in the twentieth century. The map of the globe acquired entirely new boundaries, and with it changed the international order and norms—at least juridically. More importantly, the

---

<sup>2</sup> Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 227.

<sup>3</sup> David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 27-29.

formation of the new states fundamentally transformed the experience of politics for most of the world. The singular historical importance of postcolonial independence requires no elaboration. Yet, the event itself—while overwhelming for those who experienced it—did not pose much of an interpretative conundrum. Compared to other great political foundings of the modern world, postcolonial independence seemed to have posed no meaningful challenge to the theoretical apparatus of political theory and other cognate disciplines. Writing during the heights of decolonization, Sir Isaiah Berlin could dismiss the question of anticolonial liberty with an inimitable disdain: “What they seek is...akin to what Mill called ‘pagan self-assertion’, but in a collective, socialized form.”<sup>6</sup> Following the lead of “Germans...Poles and Russians,” the colonized people thoughtlessly sought glory in national independence.<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Elie Kedourie argued that the anticolonial striving for national independence was the non-European realization of a mobile idea forged in nineteenth-century Europe. The idea of nationalism—“conceived and wholly elaborated in Europe”—fragmented great European empires into a multitude of nation-states. It was then “incoherently” adopted by the colonized peoples across Asia and Africa.<sup>8</sup> To sympathetic and critical observers alike, postcolonial founding was the extension of something already known or long in the process of becoming. As a narrative of the belated universal, the coming of independence was a founding foretold. It might have changed the course of history and altered the map of the world, but its theoretical significance was already evident—a lesson foreknown.

---

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 205.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “The Bent Twig: A Note on Nationalism,” *Foreign Affairs* 51, no. 1 (1972): 18.

<sup>8</sup> Elie Kedourie, “Introduction,” in *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, ed. Elie Kedourie (New York: Meridian Books, 1970), 28-29.

Moving away from the narrative of a founding foretold, this chapter recovers the political thought that sparked the anticolonial turn to independence in colonial India. Contrary to the commonplace assumption that anticolonial sovereignty emerged from a naturalized identification of the people with the nation, this chapter suggests that postcolonial founding was marked by the aspiration to transform the not-yet people—the masses—into the people. Instead of interpreting the opening vignette merely as an elitist maneuver, I suggest that the non-identity between the existing masses and the sovereign people—and the failure of the former to recognize itself as the sovereign—was at the core of Nehru’s project for founding a new polity. Nehru was the first major Indian anticolonial actor to take political independence as an immediate goal. He ascribed his unflinching commitment to “complete independence” to the encounter with the *kisans* or the peasants in the early 1920s. Nehru, among others, had been inspired by Gandhi to “go to the villages.”<sup>9</sup> While Gandhi’s exhortation followed from his conceptualization of the village as an ideal form of political community, Nehru’s journey through the villages would produce a distinctly non-Gandhian outlook. As he puts it: “I had not fully realized what [the Indian villages] were and what they meant to India...Ever since [these visits], my mental picture of India always contained this naked, and hungry mass.”<sup>10</sup>

The representation of the masses as “naked and hungry”— what Nehru characterized as an absence of “social freedom”—was by no means a novel argument in the 1920s. However, while these representations of the masses served earlier to subject anticolonial politics to the slow pace of developmental temporality, Nehru drew an opposite conclusion in the tumultuous global context of the 1920s. From the “picture” of the “hungry and naked” masses, he derived

---

<sup>9</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941), 75.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

authorization for an independent state that would dictate the course of development itself. He argued that political sovereignty is essential for accelerating the wheel of history, since empire could only block the development of the deprived masses. The Soviet experiment with state-led economic planning—which Nehru encountered in the 1920s—came to be crucial to conceptualizing the independent state as an agent of accelerated progress. As I show through a re-reading of Nehru’s writings and speeches from the 1920s and the 1930s, the sovereign authorization for the new state was located not so much in the will of the deprived people, but in the name of the future which the masses deserved and yet were incapable of enacting. For Nehru, the deprived people could not meaningfully exercise political freedom until they had acquired a certain amount of social freedom. In this conclusion, he was joined by the Dalit thinker B.R. Ambedkar who pointed out that the social is split into hierarchical caste groups. Out of the crisis of peoplehood, the anticolonial founders fashioned a new idea of independence: the independent state as the mediator between the deprived masses and the sovereign people.

Anticolonial political thinkers did not—and could not—take popular sovereignty as a mere constitutional principle disconnected from the utopian project of social transformation, even as popular sovereignty guided the project of postcolonial founding as an animating ideal. Nor could the problem of peoplehood be resolved within what David Scott has characterized as the “vindicationist” framework of anticolonial political thought.<sup>11</sup> For Scott, the anticolonial search for sovereignty—the “answer” to the “question” of colonialism—was a “romantic” aspiration for overcoming of the “negative” power of colonialism.<sup>12</sup> That the postcolonial founders broadly shared the Fanonian account of colonialism as a “totalizing structure” of

---

<sup>11</sup> David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004),

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-83.

subjection and fashioned the discourse of founding as a narrative of overcoming is largely correct. Nehru's view of colonialism too shared the broad contours of this "anticolonial picture of the *problem* of colonialism."<sup>13</sup> Still, for Nehru as for many of his colleagues, colonial rule introduced and deepened the cleavage between the normative ideal (popular rule) and historical reality (absence of social freedom). It is this cleavage—a disjuncture rooted in historical "underdevelopment"—that the postcolonial founding sought to address. Notwithstanding the constitutional adoption of popular sovereignty, Nehru and Ambedkar were adamant that independence does not readily mean the replacement of the sovereignty of the British with that of the Indian people. In fact, the demand for independence acquired sovereign urgency only when it became more than a negation of colonial rule. Crucial to the formation of the idea of postcolonial founding was thus the planning state which promised an accelerated transition to "real political freedom."<sup>14</sup>

In Chapter 3, I explored how the problem of development rendered the people unclaimable, complicating the rhetorical "performance" of sovereign peoplehood. The performative force of peoplehood relates essentially to its claimability—to be able to invoke and enact the people. Political theorists have long been attentive to the performative dimension of democratic founding.<sup>15</sup> To begin with, the "we the people" of a founding moment does not exist prior to the declaration of independence. The emergence of the people as a "free and independent subject" is simultaneous with the act of declaration. As Jacques Derrida famously observed in a

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 6 (original emphasis).

<sup>14</sup> Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 115.

<sup>15</sup> See, Arendt, *On Revolution*, 179-214; Bruce Ackerman, *We the People: Foundations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 200-229. Bonnie Honig, "Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 97-113.

study of the American Declaration of Independence: “If [the people] gives birth to itself... this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer.”<sup>16</sup> The authoritative, sovereign voice of the people invoked in founding documents such as the constitution plays an essential role in the formation and legitimation of constituted power. Given the inherited unclaimability of colonial peoplehood, postcolonial founders such as Nehru broke free of the impasse by dividing the people between its underdeveloped present self and the developed future self. The people that Nehru and Ambedkar invoked was not quite a willful sovereign—it was still the deprived masses unable to live up to its sovereign responsibility. Colonial rule stood between the not-yet people of underdevelopment and the developed people of the future, but its removal was not sufficient. More specifically, the authorization for the postcolonial state was summoned from this gap between the “underdeveloped” and “developed” people. Thanks to this founding promise of developmental transformation, the sovereignty derived from the colonized people essentially amounted to the sovereignty over the time of its development. The contesting visions of postcolonial founding, too, played out over different interpretations of social transformation. In other words, the authorization for the postcolonial developmental state was already built into the founding.

The chapter is comprised of two interrelated sets of arguments. The first section reconsiders the international origin narrative of anticolonial sovereignty. Given that the imperial denial of the sovereignty of the colonized was predicated on a discourse of global development, the overcoming of imperial sovereignty, too, is widely ascribed to the transformation of the international sphere. Contesting the narrative of the Wilsonian roots of anticolonial nationalism, the first section of the chapter shows how the Indian reception of Wilson’s account of “self-

---

<sup>16</sup>Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” *New Political Science* 15 (1986): 10.

determination” was quickly assimilated into the older program of “self-government within empire,” as opposed to the yet-to-be-articulated program of independent statehood. The problem of the Wilsonian program was not simply that it incompletely broke from the developmental condition of sovereignty. In India, it primarily emboldened the demand of self-government without sovereignty. Furthermore, the reliance of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination on the imperial international was almost instantaneously recognized by a number of Indian anticolonial thinkers, leading to its quick obsolescence in India by 1920. Nevertheless, the transformation of the question of self-government into an internationally claimable right was a new development. I argue that this language of rights—and the underlying structure of international recognition—went through a democratic transformation with the mutual encounter among anticolonial actors from across Asia and Africa, especially in the wake of the League Against Imperialism. Underdevelopment itself became the ground for claiming the right to sovereign statehood. However, as the following sections will show, the international claimability of anticolonial rights was not enough: the problem of peoplehood required a more fundamental resolution.

The second and third sections focus respectively on Nehru and Ambedkar’s reflections on independence and democratic founding. As I show, Nehru himself was immersed in the world of the belated universal whose very premise indefinitely deferred the anticolonial pursuit of sovereignty. The ideal of independence turned into an immediate demand only when Nehru could articulate the possibility of asserting sovereign agency over the time of development itself. For Nehru, only the sovereign state—as opposed to simply a government of Indians—could orchestrate an accelerated fulfillment of the preconditions of democracy proper. In so doing, he decisively transformed the question of independence into a problem of democratic founding. In

prioritizing the social picture of the people, Nehru characterized the “boundary problem”—especially the questions of religious and caste hierarchies—as an extension of the problem of historical backwardness.

This vision of founding would receive a trenchant riposte from Ambedkar. The question of nationhood—i.e., whether Indians share enough to be considered a common people—would be at the center of Ambedkar’s critique of the project of postcolonial founding. The hierarchies intrinsic to the social, argued Ambedkar, would reproduce themselves politically in the new state. Critiquing the “economic interpretation of history,” Ambedkar decoupled developmental progress from popular unity. For Ambedkar, the interdependence between the two faces of the people—“the people in time” and “the people in space”<sup>17</sup>—necessitated a more robust vision of founding than what Nehru and the Congress had offered. He ultimately offered a powerful argument for interpreting the social question as a political problem, as opposed to conflicts that need to be resolved before the institution of independence statehood. Having completed the draft of the Indian constitution, Ambedkar declared that it is a “delusion” to think that Indians are already one people.<sup>18</sup> Still, for all their differences, Nehru and Ambedkar agreed that Indians were yet to develop into *the* people. Nehru famously described independent statehood as a “tryst with destiny”—the beginning of an “incessant striving” to overcome the “suffering” of the

---

<sup>17</sup> I borrow these expressions from Bernard Yack. While I do not share Yack’s atemporal conceptualization of the people (as I elaborated in the Introduction), the distinction is useful in understanding the interplay between the temporal and spatial references of the concept of the people. Ambedkar found the people to be overarchingly shaped by its lack of nationhood—though he defined nationhood more in a Deweyian sense than in strictly cultural terms. Furthermore, the absence of nationhood not only disrupted the present people, but also the future people that Nehru sought to generate. See Bernard Yack, “Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism,” *Political Theory* 29, no. 4 (2001): 517-536.

<sup>18</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Three Historical Addresses of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation Research Cell, 1999), 55.

masses.<sup>19</sup> This project of overcoming “backwardness” sought to constrain the sovereignty of the given people for a future, and fuller, popular sovereignty. The source of the promises and tragedies of the great democratic experiment in the postcolonial world lies in the bargain with the future that was postcolonial founding.

### **Self-Determination and Anticolonial Sovereignty**

A concept forged in the chaotic context of the First World War, self-determination has long been seen as the crucial development that helped legitimate the anticolonial claim to sovereignty. It is credited with transforming the overarching international consensus around the non-sovereignty of the colonies into a contestable principle in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. I argue that this “expansionist” approach renders the emergence of anticolonial sovereignty as a belated realization of the ideal of sovereign statehood, contributing further to the account of postcolonial founding as a theoretical non-event.<sup>20</sup> What the Wilsonian moment facilitated was not so much a right to sovereignty, but rather a right to self-government for those who were not yet sovereign. Nor could the international discourse of self-determination quite address the main form in which colonial rule legitimated itself—a disavowal of the popular *capacity* for sovereignty in the colonies. The crisis of anticolonial sovereignty thus required a more

---

<sup>19</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “A Tryst with Destiny” in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru Second Series*, vol. 3, ed. S. Gopal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 136.

<sup>20</sup> The vision of the international as a dissemination of the English ideal was central to J.R. Seeley’s classic *The Expansion of England* (1882). A more recent iteration of the argument can be found in *The Expansion of International Society*, edited by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson. In his contribution to the volume, Bull characterizes the anticolonial struggle as a “revolt against Western dominance” in the name of “ideas and values that are themselves [ostensibly] Western.” Hedley Bull, “The Revolt Against the West,” in *The Expansion of International Society*, eds. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 222-223.

fundamental resolution than a mere extension of the idea that all “nations” have a right to self-determination.

Under the auspices of Woodrow Wilson, the principle of self-determination emerged as one of the centerpieces of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The concept of self-determination has an enlightenment lineage but its early twentieth-century political meaning was of Bolshevik origin.<sup>21</sup> Through a series of articles written on the eve of the Great War (in part as a polemic against Rosa Luxemburg), V.I. Lenin articulated an account of the “right of nations to self-determination.” The “political” definition of self-determination, argued Lenin, amounts to independent “national states.”<sup>22</sup> He formulated this account of self-determination against the claim that the economic dependence of small nations would render the ideal of self-determination a meaningless proposition. On the contrary, Lenin claimed, the “national state” is “best” suited for the development of capitalism in backward nations. Though Lenin used the language of rights to describe self-determination, his affirmation of the ideal was undergirded by its simultaneous disavowal. The “norm” of self-determination—which ultimately meant a legitimization of intra-national class exploitation—had to be kept in check so as not to undermine the international solidarity of the global proletariat.<sup>23</sup> Since the national state was a stage of capitalist development, the normative dimension of the right to self-determination was ultimately transient: “It is their [the Russian proletariat’s] task, in the interests of a successful struggle

---

<sup>21</sup> On the enlightenment origin and transformation of self-determination from an individualist notion to a collective one, see Eric Weitz, “Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015): 462-496.

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, in *Collected Works of V.I. Lenin*, ed. J. Katzer (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 396.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

against all and every kind, of nationalism among all nations, to preserve the unity of the proletarian struggle and the proletarian organizations... despite bourgeois strivings for national exclusiveness.”<sup>24</sup> The ideal of self-determination, therefore, was a normatively provisional and even strategic goal. This is not to say that Lenin’s argument failed to speak to anticolonial actors. Its purchase instead pertained to justifying the strategic necessity of self-determination rather than as a discourse of rights.<sup>25</sup>

Woodrow Wilson’s appropriation of the Bolshevik concept of self-determination following the First World War helped quickly disseminate the term throughout the globe. While Wilson used the language of rights less than Lenin, the rise of self-determination as a universal regulative ideal of international relations was ironically facilitated by the former. In sync with the British imperial language of political “fitness,” Wilson had earlier disqualified the Philippine demand for self-rule on the ground of its backwardness.<sup>26</sup> In his invocation of self-determination, Wilson was primarily interested in addressing the imperial subjection of Eastern European

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 454.

<sup>25</sup> The debate between Lenin and M.N. Roy—the Indian participant in the Third International—is suggestive here. While Lenin argued that the communist movement in colonized countries should strategically support “bourgeois-democratic liberation” projects, Roy contested the relegation of anticolonial communist movements to a pre-communist stage. He instead proposed that Indian communists should immediately strive for the same communist end as their Western counterparts. See M.N. Roy, “The Situation in India: The Report of Comrade Roy,” *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Communist International: As Reported and Interpreted by the Official Newspapers of Soviet Russia* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 42-44. For further commentaries on Roy and the Soviet policy toward anticolonial movements, see John P. Haithcox, “The Roy-Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1963): 93-101; see also, Robert C. North and Xenia J. Eudin, *M. N. Roy’s Mission to China: The Communist-Kuomintang Split of 1927* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959).

<sup>26</sup> See Woodrow Wilson, “The Ideals of America,” *Atlantic Monthly* 15 (December 1902): 721-734. For a suggestive analysis of this article of Wilson, see Michael Rogin, “Max Weber and Woodrow Wilson: The Iron Cage in Germany and America,” *Polity* 3, no. 4 (1971): 557-575.

peoples. The Fourteen Points mentioned the colonial question only once, suggesting that the “interests of the [colonized] population must have equal weight with the equitable government whose title is to be determined.”<sup>27</sup> This resolution giving “equal weight” to imperial and colonial interests was well below the criteria of self-determination, however restrictively defined. Still, as Wilson’s apprehensive Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, recognized, the term was “loaded with dynamite” and could be appropriated by unintended addressees.<sup>28</sup> Take, for example, a definition of self-determination offered by the editor of a contemporary American collection of Wilson’s war addresses: “Meaning the right of *any* people to determine for themselves under what rule they shall live—a new phrase for the ‘consent of the governed.’”<sup>29</sup> Even as the scope of the concept was less than sovereignty (the power to determine under whose or what rule the subjected people would live), there was no substantive safeguard against its global applicability.

The seamless insertion of the Wilsonian ideal into the Indian political context reveals the claimable nature as well as the restricted scope of the concept of self-determination. Even though the First World War generated a reconsideration of the ideal of “isolated sovereign independence” and bolstered federalist experimentations, the mainstream of the Congress remained tethered to the demand for representative government. The Indian Home Rule League—led by the Irish participant in the Indian anticolonial movement, Annie Besant—mobilized during the War for the demand of self-government within empire. The reception of the Wilsonian account of self-determination took place precisely against this backdrop. The annual

---

<sup>27</sup> “President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points” (January 8, 1918)

< [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp) >

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Norman Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America’s Response to War and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 248.

<sup>29</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *War Addresses of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur R. Leonard (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1918), 129 (emphasis added).

session of the Congress in December 1918 was dominated by Wilson's Fourteen Points and the new possibilities that it opened up for the anticolonial cause. The president of the session was Madan Mohan Malaviya—a Congress leader of the conservative ilk. In his address, Malaviya produced a lengthy summary of Wilson's speeches to bolster the demand that the "principle of self-determination" should be "extended to India."<sup>30</sup> The meaning of the term itself, however, proved to be open to multiple interpretative possibilities:

"Let us make it clear what we mean when we talk of self-determination. There are two aspects of self-determination, and it has been spoken of in the Peace proposals. One is that the people of certain colonies and other colonies should have the right to say whether they will live under the suzerainty of one power or of another. So far as we Indians are concerned we have no need to say that we do not desire to exercise that election. Since India passed directly under the British Crown, we have owned [sic] allegiance to the Sovereign of England....There is, however, the second and no less important aspect of self-determination, namely, that being under the British Crown, we should be allowed complete responsible government on the lines of the Dominions, in the administration of all our domestic affairs."<sup>31</sup>

As Malaviya helpfully elucidated, the range of meaning opened up by Wilson's defense of self-determination pertained to two possibilities. The former—the right of a people to choose who they want to be ruled by—was markedly less than the proposition that any people should have the right to form their own government. The second possibility—self-government without sovereignty—was the avowed ideal at least since Naoroji's swaraj speech in 1906. Malaviya was content with less than self-government—"responsible government." The Congress' resolution

---

<sup>30</sup> Madan Mohan Malaviya, "Delhi Congress Presidential Address," in *Speeches And Writings Of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya* (Madras: G.A. Natesen & Co., 1918), 524-5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 384-5.

regarding self-determination too accepted the developmental criteria of the Wilsonian principle: “This Congress claims the recognition of India *by* the British Parliament and by the Peace Conference as one of the *Progressive Nations* to whom the Principle of Self-Determination should be applied.”<sup>32</sup>

While Malaviya stopped short of calling for a full self-government within empire, the more radical section of the Congress pushed the demand further. Motilal Nehru—the moderate leader who was slowly breaking away from gradual reformism—offered another reading of self-determination: “The first principle, which the wise men of the world have laid down for their guidance at the Peace Conference is that no nation, however strong, has any right to keep in subjection another nation, however weak; that every nation in the world has a right to choose how they will be governed and by whom.—“Self-determination” is the new word that has been coined to give expression to this idea which itself is certainly not new at least to this country...The fact is that it took hold of our imaginations no less than 33 years ago when the Indian National Congress was started.”<sup>33</sup> The elder Nehru’s speech was printed in the very first issue of *The Independent*—a short-lived Allahabad-based newspaper whose establishment was spurred by the enthusiasm around self-determination. In his message for *the Independent*, C.R. Das echoed Motilal Nehru’s point: “Self-Government has been the cry of the Indian National Congress for the last thirty-three years. Today Europe and America give it another name and call

---

<sup>32</sup> “Resolutions Adopted by the Congress,” in *ibid.*, 400 (emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> Motilal Nehru, “Let your Indignation Flame,” *The Independent*, Wednesday February 5, 1919. *The Independent*’s mission statement cited Woodrow Wilson approvingly: “*The Independent*...join President Wilson in saying: ‘The select classes of mankind are no longer the governors of mankind. The fortunes of the mankind are now in the hands of the plain people of the whole world.’”

it ‘Self-Determination’ but we are old in history and the principle of Self-Determination is the one essential principle in our culture.”<sup>34</sup> Das and the elder Nehru’s stress on the equivalence of “self-determination” and “self-government” registered a resistance to the idea that the norm of self-determination came to India from without, as they feared its assimilation into the moderate agenda of “responsible government.” Lala Lajpat Rai—based in the United States at the time—voiced similar opinion in an important pamphlet called *Self-Determination for India* (1919). Rai fiercely questioned the discourse of political fitness. England, Rai argued, may have taken six hundred years to be fit for self-rule, but it took a generation for Athenians to institute democracy. He also rejected the assumption that India is an “infant nation,” suggesting instead that the nation should be understood as a “moral and political being.” Rai, however, did not call for severing the British connection. Granting India full self-government, argued Rai, would make it a “source of strength to the British commonwealth.”<sup>35</sup>

The enthusiasm for self-determination had practically disappeared by the next session of the Congress in December 1919. Having noted that Wilson’s Fourteen Points had remained mere words, Jawaharlal Nehru, writing in mid-1919, found it fitting to reproduce Bertrand Russell’s pessimistic note: “The Millennium is not for our time. The great moment has passed and for ourselves it is again the distant hope that must inspire us, not the immediate breathless looking for deliverance.”<sup>36</sup> Gandhi, on his part, had no sympathy whatsoever for the Wilsonian program. He characterized the Peace Conference as an exercise in armed peace.<sup>37</sup> For the Mahatma, the

---

<sup>34</sup> C.R. Das, “Welcome to *The Independent*,” *The Independent*, Sunday, February 9, 1919.

<sup>35</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai, *Self-Determination for India* (NY: India Home Rule League, 1919), 13.

<sup>36</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “Roads to Freedom,” in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* vol. 1, ed. S. Gopal (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), 143. [Hereafter abbreviated as *SWJN*]

<sup>37</sup> M.K. Gandhi, “Letter to C.F. Andrews,” in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 17, 300-301.

primacy of imperial will in deciding the terms of self-determination was all too apparent. The deployment of self-determination to imperial ends, Gandhi noted in early 1920, would soon become constitutive of the concept: “To say that peace terms strictly follow the principle of self-determination is to throw dust in the eyes of its readers. Is it the principle of self-determination that has caused cessation of Adrianople and Thrace to Greece? By what principle of self-determination has Smyrna been handed to Greece? ...By the time the whole thing is finished, the very name self-determination will stink in one’s nostrils.”<sup>38</sup> As a result, by the end of 1920, the ideal of self-determination seemed to have retreated to its imperial origin. The term could barely be found in Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru’s voluminous writings in the following decade. The obsolescence of the discourse of self-determination was as swift as its appearance. The debate around the juridical status of sovereignty instead came to be organized around the ideals of independence and dominion status.

In an engaging paper on the post-WWI history of anticolonial self-determination, Arnulf Lorca has attributed the appeal of the self-determination discourse among anticolonial actors to the possibility it offered of overcoming civilization as the criterion of self-government. Lorca bases his argument partly on Lala Lajpat Rai’s pamphlet *Self-Determination for India*. Rather than arguing that non-Europeans have “met the standard of civilization,” anticolonial actors claimed that they already had a civilization and were thus deserving of the right to self-determination.<sup>39</sup> This mode of argumentation about civilization, as we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, was well-entrenched in nineteenth-century India. While the critique of civilizational

---

<sup>38</sup> M.K. Gandhi, “Criticism of Muslim Manifesto,” in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. 21 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1999), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Arnulf Becker Lorca, “Petitioning the International: A “Pre-History” of Self-Determination,” *The European Journal of International Law* 25, no. 2 (2014): 501-4.

essentialism established that all people were capable of development toward self-rule, it did not dislodge the importance of historical development in evaluating the fitness for democracy. Prior to the rise of self-determination, Indian political thinkers either predicated their demand on a purported British citizenship (Naoroji) or on the natural right to self-government (Tilak). While Naoroji reinforced British sovereignty to render self-government a right, Tilak's statement concerning swaraj as a "birthright" was famous more for its rhetorical bite than for being an argument for self-government as a natural right. As Motilal Nehru and Madan Mohan Malaviya's versions of self-determination illustrate, the reception of self-determination in India did not challenge or trouble the preexisting set of demands. This was not surprising. Wilson's formulation of self-determination—as well as the League of Nations—was steeped in the developmental historicism of "political fitness." The range of demands it enabled was thus tethered to the developmental gradation of sovereignty—from "responsible government" to "self-government within empire." As Timothy Mitchell notes, the Wilsonian vision of self-determination, as an ideal, was "thin" and "lightweight."<sup>40</sup> Regardless of whether the "device" of self-determination was devised by Wilson to reconsolidate imperial control (as Mitchell would have it), its portable nature helped embolden, however momentarily, the pursuit of *self-government* as a right. Still, the question of sovereignty remained entangled in the discourse of political fitness. Manela's conclusion that the Wilsonian principle of the right of self-determination was "appropriated... by colonial nationalists" so as to posit "the self-determining nation-state as the sole legitimate entity in international relations" stems from a conflation

---

<sup>40</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011), 68, 85; for another account of the Wilsonian self-determination as a "mask for the right of conquest," see Joseph Massad, "Against Self-Determination," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9, no. 2 (2018): 166-170 .

between self-government and sovereign statehood.<sup>41</sup> As the Indian history of self-determination shows (which constitutes one major site of Manela's narrative), the denial of anticolonial sovereignty was built into the Wilsonian principle. In any case, the re-affirmation of the imperial international with the formation of the League of Nations brought an abrupt end to the optimism around international rights.

\*\*\*

For all the absorption of the concept of self-determination in the older discourse of self-government, there is one outcome that would have a lasting effect on the anticolonial movement. It pertains to the transformation of the international structure of recognition. Though the Wilsonian moment of self-determination pales in comparison with its second arrival after the Second World War, the striving to transform the historicist principle of self-determination into an immediately claimable right gained new momentum with the formation of the League Against Imperialism (LAI).<sup>42</sup> The structure of international recognition would be challenged with the mutual encounter between anticolonial actors from Asia and Africa. The frustrations with the imperial control of the League of Nations led to the formation of the LAI. One of the key actors in the LAI was Jawaharlal Nehru. It is in this conference Nehru first encountered anticolonial leaders from across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. At the opening conference in Brussels in 1927, anticolonial leaders and their European allies debated the principles and strategies of anti-imperial movements.<sup>43</sup> The LAI helped Nehru formulate an international critique of empire: imperial membership in the form of "dominion status," no matter how equal, would mean

---

<sup>41</sup> Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> For the post-WWII history of self-determination, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>43</sup> See Michele L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

complicity in the exploitation of other colonized peoples. This shared imperial subjection and exploitation, Nehru implied, should be the premise for making claims at the international level.

While the LAI's reach was far less than the Wilsonian international, its most significant impact lay in facilitating a transformation of the criteria of international recognition. Let me illustrate the critical salience of this development by revisiting a suggestive dispute between Nehru and his "moderate" colleagues at the Indian National Congress. Returning from Europe, Nehru singlehandedly pushed for a resolution about independence in the annual Congress meeting of 1927. The resolution received strong criticism from the mainstream of the Congress. Two prominent Congress politicians—C. Vijayaraghavachariar and Rajendra Prasad—opposed the resolution, arguing that its passing would make the Congress the "laughing stock of the world."<sup>44</sup> For the critics of the resolution, India was not ready for sovereignty and such a premature declaration would only compromise its international standing. The power of the discourse of political fitness, in other words, still lingered. Nehru did not contest this argument either by pointing to the post-Wilsonian international or by merely affirming the Indian "fitness" for self-rule. He instead argued that "countries such as Morocco, Turkey, Syria and Palestine were claiming independence." If they were not considered a "laughing stock" of the world, Nehru continued, neither should India be. Furthermore, if India were to stay within the British Empire, it would indirectly participate in "exploiting Egypt and Africa."<sup>45</sup> Nehru suggested the opponents of the resolution should move away from judging Indian fitness for self-rule in light

---

<sup>44</sup> Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 3, ed. S. Gopal (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Nehru, "On the Resolution of Independence," in *ibid.*, 4.

of the prehistory of European democracy (“17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries”): the demand for independence was no longer “silly” in the new world.<sup>46</sup>

The mutual recognition among colonized peoples helped displace the question of self-government from the prehistory of Europe to the contemporaneity of global anticolonialism. This reframing of the international facilitated a move away from the developmental prerequisites for belonging to the community of nations. This, however, was only a supplement, albeit an important one, to the turn toward independence in anticolonial political thought. As we shall see in the next section, the anticolonial articulation of independence was shaped primarily by a new project of accelerated social transformation, which was supported by an emerging international of anticolonial claimants. Engaging with the question of “rights” in twentieth-century anticolonial thought, Samuel Moyn has argued that the hope of “postcolonial, collective liberation from empire,” rather than “international rights,” that drove the anticolonial project.<sup>47</sup> While the right to self-determination was not insignificant, Moyn is right in prioritizing the pursuit of collective sovereignty in anticolonial thought. The problem of collective sovereignty, however, takes us back to the problem of peoplehood. After all, anticolonial thinkers had long stopped short of collective sovereignty not because the ideal was obscure, but because of the doubt concerning whether an underdeveloped people could exercise sovereignty. It is this problem that internally suspended the project of postcolonial founding. In what transpired, it was not so much that the developmental framework was disavowed; but Indian anticolonial thinkers—especially Jawaharlal Nehru—found a new avenue to affirm sovereignty over the time

---

<sup>46</sup> Nehru, “Speech at the All India Parties Conference,” in *ibid.*, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 85.

of development itself. The figure of the people, as we shall see, was crucial once again to this fateful episode of anticolonial political thought.

### **The “Starving Masses” and the Sovereignty over the Time of Development**

“Independence is not a happy word”  
(Jawaharlal Nehru)<sup>48</sup>

“It has no meaning to give a vote to a starving man”  
(Jawaharlal Nehru)<sup>49</sup>

The conventional definition of independence, notes David Armitage, connotes “political separation of the kind that the representatives of the United States asserted against King George III in 1776.”<sup>50</sup> The juridical notion of independence—influentially framed by Emer de Vattel in his mid-eighteenth-century text *The Law of Nations*—is associated with the idea of “free” and “sovereign” statehood. The “contagious consequences” of the American Declaration of Independence, argues Armitage, acquired a “near-universal significance” in the twentieth century. The apparent generic and juridical similarity between American and anticolonial declarations of independence no doubt supports Armitage’s claim.<sup>51</sup> Yet the temporal distance between the American and twentieth-century anticolonial visions of independence—separated by a century and a half—is no less striking. What exactly took two centuries for the “contagion” of

---

<sup>48</sup> Nehru, “Statement on the Independence Resolution,” in *SWJN* vol. 3, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “Revolution in India,” in *Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches 1949-53*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1954), 114.

<sup>50</sup> David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> However, as Emma Mackinnon has argued, the genres of twentieth-century rights declarations were not identical or in a “static” continuity with the earlier American and French Declarations. See Emma Mackinnon, “Declaration as Disavowal: The Politics of Race and Empire in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *Political Theory* 47, no. 1 (2019): 57-81.

sovereignty to infect the colonized? While Armitage acknowledges the preponderance of mutual recognition in the anticolonial declarations of independence, the source of contagion remains the American conception of independence.<sup>52</sup> This narrative of the globalization of the ideal of independence enacts another version of what I earlier called the belated universal. The model of independence instituted by the American Revolution was by no means unknown in nineteenth-century India. If it failed to generate urgency in the nineteenth century, it was not because of the lack of exposure to the ideal. Its later arrival, as we shall see, was predicated on a transformation of the ideal itself.

The ideas of independence and postcolonial democratic founding were overlapping yet distinct. It is this keen recognition of the non-identity between independence and democratic founding that marked the nineteenth-century Indian reckoning with the idea of independence. The vernacular public sphere from the mid-nineteenth century onward was saturated with reflections on the meanings of liberty and independence. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee—one of the most important Indian thinkers of the nineteenth century—could complain in 1873 that the Bengali encounter with European politics had resulted in endless ruminations on two words in particular: “liberty” and “independence.”<sup>53</sup> A few years later, the poet Rabindranath Tagore—still a precocious teenager—commented similarly on the contemporary obsession over the word “swadhinata” (which translates as both “independence” and “liberty” in Bengali): “It is not that

---

<sup>52</sup> As we shall see in the section on Ambedkar, the non-confrontation with the slavery question rendered the American model of independence deeply questionable to a number of anticolonial thinkers. On the distinctive creole dimension of the idea of independence in the Americas, see also, Joshua Simon, *The Ideology of Creole Revolution: Imperialism and Independence in American and Latin Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Bankimchandra Chatterjee, “Bharatbarsher Swadhinata o Paradhanita.” [Liberty and Subjection of India] in *Bankim Rachanabali*, vol. 2 (Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 1361), 211.

there was a preexisting idea of independence in our mind, which we later named accordingly; it is rather that we have picked up the word and have been worshipping it as though it is a thing.”<sup>54</sup> As Bankim’s prescient reflections clarify, the limits of the idea of independence as mere external sovereignty guided its earliest conceptualizations. Bankim emphatically distinguished the idea of independence from that of liberty. If the former refers to territorial sovereignty, the latter concerns the equality of all, especially the equality between the ruling and the ruled races. Under the British, Bankim concludes, India is both subjected and unfree. In the ancient era, even as India was independent, it was no less hierarchical given its caste system. The ideal, therefore, had to be independence with equality and liberty. This conclusion would lead Bankim to suspend the question of independence until the conditions for equality and liberty had been generated.

Bankim was not alone in this regard. His more radical successors, such as Aurobindo Ghose, would continue to acknowledge the normative poverty of independence without democracy. Ghose argued that the meaning of “swadhinata” concerns both external and internal freedom: “As long as there is foreign rule, a people is not free. At the same time, until a popular republic has been founded, the people of a given nation cannot be considered free either.”<sup>55</sup>

Those who demanded immediate independence in the wake of the Swadeshi Movement—such as Shyamji Krishnavarma’s *Indian Sociologist*—had to explicitly disavow the equal importance of democratic founding.<sup>56</sup> The “severance of the British connection” (as was the customary way of referring to independence) by itself was widely taken to be a normatively inadequate resolution

---

<sup>54</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali* vol. 17 (Kolkata: Visvabharati Granthalay, 1407), 369 [my translation].

<sup>55</sup> Aurobindo Ghose, “Swadhinatar Artha” [The Meaning of Liberty] in *Writings in Bengali and Sanskrit* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2017), 116 [my translation].

<sup>56</sup> “India House,” *The Indian Sociologist* 1, no. 10 (1905): 38.

of the problem of peoplehood. The alternative, as I have demonstrated earlier in the dissertation, was mired in the developmental framework. The simultaneous striving for independence and democracy meant a return to the fraught process of waiting for the people. On the British side, John Stuart Mill, T.B. Macaulay, and J.R. Seeley—three of the most influential nineteenth-century British commentators on colonialism—variously associated the end of imperial rule with the emergence of an independent India fit for democracy. Even for the host of Indian thinkers who made claims for limited Indian self-government (without sovereignty), the idea that independence needs to coincide with democratic founding guided their political vision. The concept of independence was thus simultaneously (intellectually) familiar and a (politically) distant entity in nineteenth-century Indian political thought.

The appearance of the demand for independence in the 1920s was not then a belated seduction of the colonized by sovereignty. Nor was it the case that independence and democratic founding finally became dissociated, paving the way for immediate affirmation of the former. Curiously enough, it was a new encounter with the masses—not as the self-determining people but rather as the repository of misery and poverty—that transformed the calculus of independence and democracy. In 1920, the Gandhi-led Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement took India by storm, generating unprecedented popular participation. Though Gandhi helped transform the anticolonial movement into a mass movement, his distinctive vision of individual self-rule steadfastly avoided the question of political sovereignty. As Nehru later observed, Gandhi remained “delightfully vague” about the institutional arrangement of swaraj. Gandhi’s call for boycotting British goods and institutions was directly related to the vision of making Indian villages self-sufficient and self-contained. Gandhi also exhorted Congress workers to spend time in the Indian villages. One such recruit of Gandhi—his “first devotee” in North

India<sup>57</sup>— was Jawaharlal Nehru. Having spent most of his youth in British boarding schools and universities, the younger Nehru’s connection with the villages was more superficial than usual. Nehru’s encounter with the *kisans* (peasants) was to be the beginning of his departure from his mentor, Gandhi. Along the way, Nehru derived an argument for anticolonial sovereignty from the picture of the immiserated “naked” masses.

A generation apart from the Congress moderates and extremists, Nehru grew up in an age when the older discourse about the developmental “mission” of British rule—though not the developmental framework itself—had been widely discredited. Though Nehru had been critical of the affirmation of imperial sovereignty by the Congress moderates, he did not either consider India “ready” to “sever” the British connection. Prior to being swept away by Gandhi, Nehru’s most notable political participation was acting as a secretary for Annie Besant’s Home Rule League. While Besant resuscitated the demand for “home rule,” her League also emphatically defended self-government within empire.<sup>58</sup> Nehru was not untouched by the critique of centralized monist sovereignty flourishing in the wake of the Great War. In the aforementioned 1919 review of Bertrand Russell’s *Road to Freedom*, Nehru expressed his sympathy for Russell’s diagnosis of the inadequacy of representative government. Still, he concluded that “we in India have yet to travel over the long road of representative government before we can proceed on different lines.”<sup>59</sup> The experience of the Non-Cooperation Movement would embolden Nehru’s republican investments. The true meaning of self-government, Nehru declared in 1921, lies in the idea that “every Indian, every Hindu, Mussalman, Sikh or Christian, who

---

<sup>57</sup> A.S. Iyengar, *Role of the Press and Indian Freedom Struggle: All through the Gandhian Era* (New Delhi: A.P. H. Publishing Corporation, 2001), 23.

<sup>58</sup> On Annie Besant and the Home Rule League, see Mark Bevir, “The Formation of the All-India Home Rule League,” *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 3 (1991): 341-356.

<sup>59</sup> Nehru, “Roads to Freedom” in *SWJN*, vol. 1, 144.

lives in India and who is proud of calling it his motherland should be free and should have the right to take part in the government of the country.”<sup>60</sup> This argument was enabled by Nehru’s brief flirtation with the federalist alternative: the rule of panchayat raj or village republics.<sup>61</sup> Even as there could be no “real understanding” between India and Britain, it was not a call for immediate independence. The articulation of federalist swaraj was accompanied by the caution that the “last stage is very far away.”<sup>62</sup>

Calling his own outlook at that point “bourgeois,” Nehru later recounted that the encounter with peasants was the beginning of his realization that Congress had been “cut off...from [the] people.”<sup>63</sup> The Congress’ account of “political freedom” was detached from the “the peasantry” who were “a blind, poverty-stricken, suffering mass, resigned to their miserable fate and sat upon and exploited by all who came in contact with them— the Government, landlords, money-lenders, petty officials, police, lawyers, priests.”<sup>64</sup> His break from his predecessors resided in the answer he articulated in response to mass deprivation. Nehru did perceptively underscore the great “sense of power” that the assembled masses generated. He also

---

<sup>60</sup> Nehru, “Presidential Address at the Bundhelkhand Conference,” in *ibid.*, 180

<sup>61</sup> Referring to this speech, Judith Brown argues that Nehru conceptualized swaraj “partly in political terms and partly in cultural terms” in the early 1920s. I would suggest that Nehru’s invocation of panchayat raj is less a culturalist reference and more an invocation of the federalist project. Nehru was reading federalist literature at this point and also registered a sympathy for a version of pluralism (guild socialism) in his 1919 review of Russell’s *Road to Freedom*. See Judith Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 63.

<sup>62</sup> Nehru, “Presidential Address at the Bundhelkhand Conference” in *SWJN* vol. 1, 182.

<sup>63</sup> Nehru, on his part, did underscore the crucial role of this encounter: “I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if I had not [encountered the peasants]. Very probably I would have been drawn to the *kisans* anyhow, sooner or later, but the manner of my going to them would have been different, and the effect on me might also have been different.”

Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 56.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 54

celebrated the tenacious resistance showed by the peasants despite their misery. Nevertheless, in his judgment the weight of deprivation and destitution rendered the masses sociologically as well as politically incapable. The overarching lack of “social freedom” compromises the capacity to enact political freedom: “The Indian *kisans* have little staying power, little energy to resist for long. Famines and epidemics come and slay them in their millions.”<sup>65</sup> For Nehru, the anticolonial project should neither ignore nor glorify the peasants. This realization would constitute one of his long-standing disagreements with the Mahatma. One of the expressions that Gandhi would often use to refer to the Indian poor was *daridranarayan*—or the poor-as-God. Gandhi’s ethics of self-sacrifice and non-possession shared little with Nehru’s project of social transformation. While poverty only accentuated the urgency of moral self-rule for Gandhi, Nehru was deeply irked by his elusive mentor’s “glorification of poverty;” the burden of poverty is a “hateful thing, to be fought and rooted out and not to be encouraged in any way.”<sup>66</sup>

This figure of the deprived people—notwithstanding their lack of “energy to resist”—sat at the heart of the anticolonial project: “India is in the main the peasant and the worker, not beautiful to look at, for poverty is not beautiful.”<sup>67</sup> Instead of delaying sovereignty on the ground of popular backwardness, Nehru fashioned a new argument for independence out of this picture of the masses. This new vision of independence, as he saw it, had to be revolutionary. In Nehru’s telling, his predecessors at the Congress, especially the so-called liberals, understood independence to be a mere change of political power. Returning to the recurrent “house” metaphor,<sup>68</sup> Nehru reflected on different visions of postcolonial founding:

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>68</sup> For a study of the homology between the household and the social in modern imperial thought, see Patricia Owens, *The Economy of Force: Counterinsurgency and the Historical Rise of the*

“The British treated India as a kind of enormous country house (after the Old English fashion) that they owned. They were the gentry owning the house, while the Indians were consigned to the servants’ hall, the pantry, and the kitchen...[The Liberals] accept the country house in its entirety, admire its architecture and the whole edifice, but look forward to replacing the owners, one by one, by themselves. They call this Indianization...They never think in terms of a new State.”<sup>69</sup>

It was thus time for thinking about postcolonial founding in terms of statehood, as opposed to the framework of self-government which reduced the problem of founding to the Indian control of the administration. The new state should aim to build a new “house” instead of limiting itself to the maintenance of the institutions inherited from the British. This is precisely the move that radically separated Nehru from both the “moderate” and “extremist” vision of self-rule. Nehru notes that he did not arrive to this view of independence directly. His gradual shift to the demand for independence in the 1920s was directly sparked by the realization that “political independence meant, of course, political freedom only, and did not include any social change or economic freedom for the masses.” Such a conception of independence would also take Nehru back to the problem-space of the swaraj theorists: absent a people capable of sovereignty, who could authorize and sustain a democratic polity? The vision of independence to which Nehru arrived afterward sought to move beyond the mere incidental benefit of severing the British connection—or even the idea of “the removal of the financial and economic chains which bind us to the City of London, and this would have made it easier for us to change the social

---

*Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For a qualification of the homology as a “creative transposition” of the techniques of household rule to the social (as opposed to the idea that the house is the “archetype” of the social), see Patchen Markell, “Domestic Homologies and Household Politics: A Comment on Patricia Owens’s *Economy of Force*,” *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 3 (2016): 193-200.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-5.

structure.”<sup>70</sup> Nehru ultimately concluded that “real political freedom” was unlikely to result from mere independence. The primacy of the social is inescapable.<sup>71</sup> This was the crux of the problem that postcolonial founding needed to resolve. For independence to be a founding proper, it had to address the question of the masses incapable of experiencing the “real political freedom.”

The outstanding question, then, was: what form of statehood should be instituted to address and account for the backwardness of the colonial masses? The problem with the federalist and Gandhian account of the village republics was that they thought in “terms of scarcity” and did not strive to imagine a political life where the people would be “abundantly supplied with the necessities of life.”<sup>72</sup> Nehru also formulated a critique of the drain theory popularized by Dadabhai Naoroji. The source of the drain, he argued, is not just the British Empire but the entire “economic structure” itself.<sup>73</sup> “Real” political freedom, as it were, could only be realized after the stranglehold of scarcity had been overcome. Yet the alternative was not clear. The process of development—subjected to its own laws and requirements—had long been taken to be a slow process. How exactly would political sovereignty overcome the barrier of the slow time of development? After all, the suspension of anticolonial sovereignty earlier was predicated on the inefficacy of independence without the historical fitness for democratic self-rule. Nehru’s answer to this conundrum was innovative in the anticolonial context: the new state, once founded, would exert sovereignty over the time of development itself to hasten the arrival of the future that the people deserve.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>73</sup> Nehru, *Selected Works* vol. 2, 350-1.

Nehru's encounter with Marxism and the Soviet Union was important to the formation of this new account of independence. Two cornerstones of Nehru's political thought—abiding commitments to the “economic interpretation of history” and the “planned economy”—took shape in the period of his “fascination” with Soviet Russia.<sup>74</sup> Following his brief trip to the Soviet Union in November 1927, Nehru immersed himself in the contemporary literature on the October Revolution and the Soviet Union. Between April and July of 1928, he wrote no less than sixteen articles on various aspects of the Russian experiment. Nehru's appropriation of Soviet Marxism was selective. While he was drawn to the primacy of the economic, the political structure of the party-state troubled him. The primacy of the economy stood at the center of his recalibration of the relationship between “social” and “political” freedom. The project of accelerating the course of development emerged from Nehru's encounter with the Soviet Five-Year-Plan. The idea of planning allowed him to conceptualize the possibility of leaping over the slow steps of progress. As he put it later: “We are trying to catch up, as far as we can, with the Industrial Revolution that occurred long ago in Western countries.”<sup>75</sup> The phase of industrialization, by itself, was a process strewn with the “major evil” of exploitation. Nehru thus concluded that a democratic form of planning—led by a democratic state at the helm of economic production and distribution—would best facilitate the “onward march” to the “future society.”<sup>76</sup>

The simultaneous enlisting and subordination of the Russian peasants to the developmental project was crucial to Nehru's narration of the Soviet system. Much like the old

---

<sup>74</sup> Nehru, “The Fascination of Russia,” in *SWJN* vol. 2, 381.

<sup>75</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches 1949-53* vol.2 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India, 1954), 94.

<sup>76</sup> Nehru, “Presidential Address at the Punjab Provincial Conference,” in *SWJN* vol. 3, 222.

Marxist view of the peasantry as non-revolutionary, Nehru was concerned about possible peasant resistance to large-scale economic development. The redistribution of lands and resources to the peasants itself could not be enough to overcome their resistance to the rapid march of history. The practice of collective farming, Nehru observed, is generating a new ethos of progress in Russia: “The tractor is almost a god in Russia today and it is the tractor that has led to large-scale co-operation on the land.”<sup>77</sup> The Russian peasants had no practice of freedom and were “lazy and ignorant, demoralized and incapable of any great effort.” It was the genius of the Russian leadership that “converted this poor human material into a strong, organized nation, full of faith in its mission and confidence in itself.”<sup>78</sup> The point of Nehru’s revolutionary zeal was not to keep the masses out of politics entirely; it was rather a hope for infusing the people from above with the almost spiritual drive of development. As Dipesh Chakrabarty put it while discussing the Nehruvian planning regime: “What Nehru’s vision called for was faith in both the people of the country and in the project of modernization in the interest of unleashing popular energies in creating a nation.”<sup>79</sup>

The emergence of independence as an immediate demand—a demand for sovereignty here and now—would be born out of this conjuncture. Turning against his father’s recommendation of dominion status for India in the 1928 “Nehru Report,” the younger Nehru devoted himself to campaign for the “Republican ideal” upon his return to India in December

---

<sup>77</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “The Peasant and the Land,” in *SWJN*, vol. 2, 439.

<sup>78</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd., 1939 [1934]), 656

<sup>79</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Planetary Crisis and the Difficulty of Being Modern,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2017): 277; see also Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture,” in *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 45-68.

1927.<sup>80</sup> As I noted in the previous section, Nehru’s resolution for independence was criticized as an impractical and laughable suggestion. The widespread scoffing at the demand for independence as a “utopian” initiative, argued Nehru, belies how “practical politics” had been stuck in the “morass of nowhere.”<sup>81</sup> The colonial state—and the “feudal” elements in India—were essentially suppressing the march of progress. That the colonial state was blocking, rather than advancing development was a well-worn trope since the late nineteenth century. Nehru’s conceptualization of independence as a new founding—as opposed to “self-government”—displaced this older terrain of arguments. As a republican, Nehru’s commitment to the principle of popular sovereignty was not simply instrumental. Nehru did not, for example, value universal franchise merely for its instructive purpose; he appreciated universal franchise for its own intrinsic democratic meaning. Its most immediate purchase, however, resided in ushering in the sovereignty of the planning state: the “large-scale state planning was impossible so long as the central government was not under popular control.”<sup>82</sup> The sovereign independence of the people would allow the new state to assert full control over the pace at which the masses were to be developed. The association of the planning state with political sovereignty attributed an altogether new urgency to the demand for independence. It is in this sense the project of transforming the masses into a people was constitutive of postcolonial founding. The slow, gradualist image of development lost its autonomy and came under the grip of political power. The colonies finally could assert decisive control over the time of their development. The Soviet-

---

<sup>80</sup> Nehru, “Presidential Address at the First Session of the Republican Congress,” in *SWJN* vol. 3, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Nehru, “Presidential Address at the Kerala Provincial Conference,” in *SWJN*, vol. 3, 235.

<sup>82</sup> Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 375.

inspired planning state was thus not simply a choice that Nehru made after deciding on the necessity of independence; it rather enabled the articulation of the idea of independence itself.

In his classic *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Partha Chatterjee suggested that there was a gap between Nehru's goal of establishing "a sovereign national state" and the means of "[mobilizing] the masses in the movement towards that goal."<sup>83</sup> In Nehru's overwhelming "scientific" vision of economic development, the invocation of the people, as in our opening vignette of *Bharat Mata*, is "just another slogan" tethered to political pragmatism.<sup>84</sup> For Chatterjee, Nehru's developmental agenda is only superficially related to his political rhetoric; he appropriated a pre-existing "language" for a "mature nationalist" and "rationalist" end. As we have seen, Nehru's figure of the "starving masses" was not a mere instrument—nor was it conceptually unrelated to the project of the planning state. The deprived masses served both as the originary cause as well as the telos of the sovereign developmental state: the authorization for the developmental state was derived precisely from the gap between the immiserated and unfree people of the present and the developed and free people of the future. This aspect of Nehru's political thought is thus better understood as an innovation than an uncritical inheritance from the past. The otherwise scientific and progressive project of postcolonial founding was intrinsically dependent on the problem of incomplete peoplehood. Chatterjee is right to emphasize that the people were more of an object than the subject of the planning state. The source of this problem is, however, not simply the faith in the scientific process of development; it is already built into the picture of the people that undergirded the Nehruvian vision of postcolonial founding. While the principle of popular sovereignty would be

---

<sup>83</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 131.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

constitutionally enshrined in the wake of postcolonial founding, it was hardly a re-instantiation of the classic eighteenth-century notion of popular sovereignty. Not primarily the lawmakers or the agents of rule, the people is instead that which licensed its own transformation.

At its core, Nehru's resolution of the problem of peoplehood was temporal. Between the present "starving" masses and the future people of social "abundance," the developmental planning state stood as the mediator. Nehru's framework was especially weak with regard to the problem of settling the "boundary problem." As Nehru was formulating the project of postcolonial founding, the political horizon of colonial India was clouded by extraordinary series of sectarian conflicts. One, and the better known, part of Nehru's argument against the seeming disunity of India concerned what he called a fundamental "cultural" unity across historical and geographical differences.<sup>85</sup> The plural and "tolerant" culture of India assimilated many groups and religions, laying the foundation for its political unity. This aspect of Nehru's argument was neither new nor particularly effective. His attempt to resolve the issues of inter-religious and inter-caste domination through a pre-political inheritance of unity fell flat in an age of intensified sectarian conflicts. His more pointed response to the "problem of minorities" resided in a historicist faith in the primacy of progress. Rendering the communal and caste problems as superstructural issues, Nehru would repeatedly characterize the boundary problem as a byproduct of social backwardness. The demands for Muslim autonomy and separate electorates—which, for him, amounted to a cutting up of postcolonial sovereignty—fundamentally troubled what by the 1940s had become the hegemonic project of postcolonial founding. If sovereignty was divided, there would not only be "perpetual conflict" but also "all planned economic and cultural

---

<sup>85</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Unity of India: Collected Writings 1937-40* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941), 15.

progress would become impossible.”<sup>86</sup> For Nehru, the boundary problem too needed to be subordinated to the higher call of progress—i.e., the concentration of sovereignty required for the planning state. As India’s independence from Britain was becoming an imminent possibility, Nehru’s political project would face its strongest yet intellectual challenge from the Dalit thinker, B.R. Ambedkar.

### **The Colonial Social and the Two Faces of the Problem of Peoplehood**

“Indians are not a nation,” noted B.R. Ambedkar in his classic *Annihilation of Caste*, “they are only an amorphous mass of people.”<sup>87</sup> The Congress’ relentless affirmation of Indian nationhood since the nineteenth century was rooted in the assumption that “nationality had a most intimate connection with the claim for self-government.” Furthermore, Ambedkar argued, invoking H.G. Wells, a people without a claim to nationhood is akin to a “man...without his clothes in a crowded assembly.”<sup>88</sup> Indians—or upper-caste Hindus here—thus never took a moment to ask if “nationality was merely a question of *calling* a people a nation or was a question of the people *being* a nation.”<sup>89</sup> Ambedkar had no naïve faith in an ontology of nationhood. He noted elsewhere that words such as nation are necessarily “amorphous,” and it is futile to look for an overarching sociological unity to define the category.<sup>90</sup> Instead, “nationality is a social

---

<sup>86</sup> Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 308

<sup>87</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, ed. S. Anand (New Delhi: Navanaya, 2014), 243.

<sup>88</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol. 8 (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014), 29-30. [Hereafter abbreviated as BAWS]

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* (original emphasis).

<sup>90</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* in BAWS vol. 9, 201-2.

feeling...it is a feeling of corporate sentiment of oneness.”<sup>91</sup> In an unmistakably Deweyian vein,<sup>92</sup> Ambedkar suggested that what it was at stake is not whether Indians share similar inheritances, but rather if they “[possess] things in common...and the only way by which men can come to possess things in common with one another is by being in communication.”<sup>93</sup>

As the demand for independence intensified, Ambedkar launched a searching critique of the demos underlying the project of democratic founding. In a polemical vein, Ambedkar singles out the emphasis put on national unity by Congress thinkers such as Nehru. The meaning of national unity was still dominated by its preeminent nineteenth-century connotation: the sense of common belonging and political cohesion.<sup>94</sup> Though generally considered to be an essential condition of self-rule, the mere presence of nationhood did not necessarily amount to popular sovereignty. For most of the nineteenth century, Indian as well as imperial thinkers agreed that both national unity and historical advancement were lacking among the colonized people. Since

---

<sup>91</sup> Ambedkar, *Pakistan* in *BAWS* vol.8, 31.

<sup>92</sup> Ambedkar studied with John Dewey at Columbia University and was deeply influenced by his approach to the question of political community. Ambedkar’s uses of Dewey have been studied by a number of scholars. See, in particular, Arun P. Mukherjee, “B.R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy,” *New Literary History* 40, no. 2 (2009): 345-370; Scott R. Stroud, “What Did Ambedkar Learn from John Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*?” *The Pluralist* 12, no. 2 (2017): 78-103; Keya Maitra, “Ambedkar and the Constitution of India: A Deweyian Experiment,” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 9, no. 2 (2012): 301-320.

<sup>93</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 245.

<sup>94</sup> As a representative example, John Stuart Mill’s definition of nationality in *Considerations on Representative Government* is helpful here: “A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a Nationality, if they are united among themselves by common sympathies, which do not exist between them and any others—which make them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves, exclusively. This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes.”

John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XIX-Essays on Politics and Society Part 2, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 546.

the Swadeshi Movement in the early twentieth century, the argument for national unity took an increasingly cultural turn, even as political thinkers who propagated nationalism often accepted historical backwardness (Tilak and Pal). Nehru's progressivist resolution of national disunity, too, relied on a prior discourse of "cultural unity." The fragile imagination of the cultural unity of the Indian people unraveled with the rise of the Muslim League. Spurred by the fear of Hindu majoritarianism, the Muslim League demanded a separate political arrangement for the Indian Muslims. The main contention of the League consisted in a fundamental rejection of the claims of a unified Indian nationhood. In the words of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the League: "India is divided and partitioned by Nature... Where is the nation which is denationalised? India is composed of nationalities, to say nothing about castes and subcastes."<sup>95</sup> Although the rhetoric of the League often relied on a naturalized language of nationhood, its claim to a separate sovereign state for the Indian Muslims followed from an anxiety regarding the "politics of numbers." As Faisal Devji has argued in his study of Pakistan, the Muslim League's argument for a separate state was partly based on the assumption that the "largely illiterate and superstitious" people of India would be unable to rise beyond their particularity and would ultimately reinforce a communal majoritarianism.<sup>96</sup>

Ambedkar was the most profound thinker of what we might call the boundary problem of Indian peoplehood.<sup>97</sup> For Ambedkar, the problem is constitutive of Hindu society and is

---

<sup>95</sup> Muhammad Ali Jinnah, *Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: Speeches, Statements, Writings, Letters, etc.*, ed. Muhammad Haneef Shahid (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1976), 25

<sup>96</sup> Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 86.

<sup>97</sup> The term, "boundary problem," refers not only to the problem of drawing an external border of the political community, but, more generally, as Frederick Whelan elaborates, to the problem of defining "membership of the democratic body, or citizenry." For Ambedkar, as we shall see, the problem was more than a juridical one—i.e., whether the members of a new polity would be able

irreducible to the question of economic development. The caste system is fundamentally “anti-social,” preventing as it does Indians “from becoming a society with unified life and a consciousness of its own being.”<sup>98</sup> As a principle of social organization, the caste system forms a gradation of sovereignty and divides the social into non-polarizable fragments. In a caste-centric society, the “parts” never become “one whole.”<sup>99</sup> It is almost as though each caste is a “nation” itself.<sup>100</sup> Ambedkar suggested that the figure of the Brahmin was evocative of the Nietzschean superman, as they enjoyed the superior right to live, rule, and fashion norms for the rest.<sup>101</sup> Much like Nietzsche’s proverbial superman, the Brahmin is incompatible with the modern ideals of “liberty, equality and fraternity.” This is precisely why the institution of political sovereignty would only result in a “communal majority” in India. Political revolution without social revolution was meaningless, and even dangerous. Presenting evidence from Ancient Rome and India, he contended that a mere political revolution would only accentuate the social discord. Given this fracture within, a nation made of castes could neither defend itself against aggressors nor lay the groundwork for unity. The social, as it were, was destined to determine the political. Ambedkar further contended that what the “politicals” do not realize is the idea that “democracy [is] not a form of Government : it [is] essentially a form of society.”<sup>102</sup> If a similar realization led

---

to participate in political life *as equals*. See Frederick G. Whelan, “Prologue: Democratic Theory and the Boundary Problem,” *Nomos* 25(1983): 13-47; see also, Arash Abizadeh, “On the Demos and Its Kin: Nationalism, Democracy, and the Boundary Problem,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 4 (2012): 867-882.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>99</sup> Ambedkar, *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah*, in *BAWS* vol.1, 234.

<sup>100</sup> Ambedkar, “Thoughts on Linguistic States,” in *BAWS* vol. 1, 169.

<sup>101</sup> Ambedkar, *Philosophy of Hinduism* in *BAWS* vol. 3, 74-77. Ambedkar’s comparison between the philosophy of Hinduism and that of Nietzsche was not unaware of their differences. He, in fact, considered Hinduism to be more “odious” than Nietzsche because of its reliance on birth as opposed to will-to-power (77).

<sup>102</sup> Ambedkar, *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah*, in *BAWS* vol.1, 222.

the Jacobins to politically regenerate the torn social fabric,<sup>103</sup> Ambedkar opted to first redeem the social before instituting political sovereignty. Unless the “Hindu society becomes a casteless society,” he concluded, political freedom would only be a “step toward slavery.”<sup>104</sup>

Ambedkar was well-familiar with the scholarship on nationality, ranging from Ernest Renan to Arnold Toynbee. He agreed with Renan that nationality is more often a product of historical “forgetfulness” than of natal bonds.<sup>105</sup> Distinguishing “nationality” from “nationalism,” Ambedkar also underscored that the presence of national “consciousness” does not always result in a demand for political sovereignty.<sup>106</sup> Regardless of the source of nationality, the “will to live as a nation,” he concluded, was an essential requirement for modern democracy. This is the vital consideration that Ambedkar found lacking in the Congress’ affirmation of Indian nationhood. The rise of self-determination—which Ambedkar took to be equivalent to nationalism—further reinforced a readily given idea of the nation.<sup>107</sup> In his voluminous writings in the 1930s and 1940s, Ambedkar would challenge again and again the identity assumed between the people and the nation, posing a new set of questions for the project of postcolonial founding.

Ambedkar’s contestation of the terms of peoplehood would play out through a dispute over the question of the social. The primacy of the social in the popular sovereignty discourse, of course, was not unique to the colonial world. As Hannah Arendt famously argued in *On*

---

<sup>103</sup> On this point, see Kevin Duong, “The People as a Natural Disaster: Redemptive Violence in Jacobin Political Thought,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 4 (2017): 786-800.

<sup>104</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 317.

<sup>105</sup> Ambedkar, *Pakistan*, 34-37.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>107</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, “Why Indian Labour is Determined to Win the War,” in *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 10 (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 1991), 39-40.

*Revolution*, the French revolutionary discourse of collective will was rooted in a social image of the people as destitute and oppressed. Although Nehru's starving masses did not double as a collective will, the same destitute image of the masses, as we have seen, was at the core of his vision of postcolonial founding. Nehru's account of the social, however, is only partially representative of the colonial history of the social. The colonial meaning of the social had long been shaped by the idea of "social reform." Ubiquitous in nineteenth-century India, the meaning of "social reform" was associated with the project of transforming India's gendered cultural practices (e.g., child marriage, widow remarriage, female education, and so on). In the wake of the Ilbert Bill controversy, the arguments supporting the political unfitnes of the colonized, as Mrinalini Sinha has shown, took an increasingly gendered form.<sup>108</sup> As the Congress began to make claims for political participation in the late nineteenth century, the priority of social reform over self-government began to be widely questioned. Revisiting the crucial decade of the 1890s, Ambedkar engaged in a revealing posthumous debate with W.C. Bonnerjee, the first president of the Congress. On his part, Bonnerjee was addressing the disqualification of Indians from political office on the ground of their civilizational backwardness: "I for one have no patience with those who say we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system...Are we not fit because our widows remain unmarried...because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge?"<sup>109</sup> Ambedkar returned the question to Bonnerjee: "Are we fit for political power even though you do not allow a large class of your own countrymen like

---

<sup>108</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 213.

the Untouchables to use public schools...Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public streets?"<sup>110</sup>

The separation of the political from the social had ensured the Congress' non-confrontation with the caste problem. For Ambedkar, the twentieth-century incarnation of Bonnerjee's argument is the "economic interpretation of history." Ambedkar no doubt had Nehru in mind. Although not unsympathetic to socialism, Ambedkar found the positing of property as the "source" of all power thoroughly unconvincing.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, insofar as the socialist ideal of revolution presupposes the possibility of unity among the proletariat, the graded hierarchy of caste system would make such an event impossible. India never had a "social revolution" because the caste system had rendered the "lower classes of India...disabled for direct action." "Social war," Ambedkar concedes, is universal, but the distinctive inheritance of India is that the weak was deprived of all three "weapons" of change: physical, political, and moral.<sup>112</sup> Unlike Nehru, Ambedkar thus registered a profound distrust in the onward march of history. Mere progress would exacerbate rather than mend the social fracture, as the very essence of the Hindu society was anti-political. Whereas for Nehru social backwardness resided primarily in the economic destitution of the masses, Ambedkar located it in the religious and caste structure of the Hindu society.

The history of the American Revolution—and the experience of American democracy—was crucial to Ambedkar's arguments. If the function of a "frugal" government of the Jeffersonian variant was to police and to maintain the rights of the people, it would amount to an "absurdity" in India. For the preexisting rights in the Indian social were split between those who

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 274-6.

have excess of rights (i.e., Brahmin) and those who had none (i.e., the untouchables). The second option was to found a polity and distribute new rights to the people. This “idea of fundamental rights” conferred by a new constitution runs into its own problems in India, Ambedkar argued. Insofar as rights are safeguarded by the “moral and social conscience of the society” and not just by laws, the introduction of new rights, however egalitarian, would be undone by the social. There was no defense against the “multitude.” Just as Black Americans had no use of fundamental rights, the same consequence would await the Indian untouchables. The experience of the American Civil War further illustrated this point. The United States owed the preservation of its union to Black Americans who constituted the largest chunk of the military. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments legally abolished slavery and conferred citizenship, but the continued social exclusion of the freed slaves withheld those rights in practice. The American Republicans ultimately formed a “compact” with the Southern Democrats at the expense of Black Americans. “The Untouchables,” thus concludes Ambedkar, “cannot forget the fate of the Negroes.”<sup>113</sup>

Ambedkar’s diagnosis of the fractured social generated two, often mutually uneasy, political possibilities: the politics of waiting for the social to mend or of disrupting the neat order of postcolonial founding by inserting the figure of the Dalit into the quest for future. Ambedkar’s program of separate electorate—where the lower caste would vote separately as a people—was designed to resist the oneness of the people. When Gandhi resisted this institutional resolution of what he took to be a moral problem (untouchability) at the famous Poona Pact of 1932, Ambedkar was faced with the perennial plight of the minority in the age of representative democracy. If the numerical majority is destined to devolve into “communal majority,” the

---

<sup>113</sup> Ambedkar, *What Gandhi and Congress have Done to the Untouchables*, 173-77.

principle of popular sovereignty is a dangerous foray into the future for the minority.

Unsurprisingly, the problem of the social was mired in the imperial promise of development.<sup>114</sup>

With the defeat of the proposal for separate electorates, the alternative left for Ambedkar—to delay the Indian independence to reform the social—was a path all too often frequented by the partisans of empire.<sup>115</sup>

Ambedkar notes that the desire among Indians, as a subjected people, to cut off the British connection is understandable. The celebration of the ideal of independence for the sake of it still befuddled him. His polemics would occasionally come close to reproducing the imperial discourse.<sup>116</sup> Echoing Bipin Chandra Pal’s warning about the “disastrous consequences” of the French Revolution, Ambedkar, on one occasion, argued that the lesson of the “premature” Chinese revolution should serve as an example to the Indians vying for independence.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, Ambedkar corresponded with Winston Churchill and W.E.B. Du Bois at the same time to recruit imperial as well as left-international support for the cause of the Dalit.<sup>118</sup> Still, Ambedkar had no faith in imperial sovereignty, nor did he find the ideal of independence normatively

---

<sup>114</sup> On the heightened imperial as well as Indian effort in the early twentieth century to domesticate the caste question to “the social,” see Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), 217-239.

<sup>115</sup> On the imperial uses of the social, see Patricia Owens, “The Colonial Limits of Society” in *The Economy of Force: Counterinsurgency and the Historical Rise of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 131-172

<sup>116</sup> Ambedkar, *Ranade*, in *BAWS*, vol. 1, 234.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-5.

<sup>118</sup> On the Ambedkar-Churchill correspondence, see Jesús Francisco Cháirez-Garza, “‘Bound by Hand and Foot and Handed Over to the Caste Hindus’: Ambedkar, Untouchability, and the Politics of Partition,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 55, no. 1 (2018): 1-28. For a comparative study of Ambedkar and Du Bois’ thought, see Anupama Rao, “Deprovincializing Anticaste Thought: A Genealogy of Ambedkar’s Dalit,” in *The Postcolonial Contemporary: Political Imaginaries for the Global Present*, eds. Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder (NY: Fordham University Press, 2018), 126-46.

undesirable.<sup>119</sup> The more productive avenue of his argument lay in the attempt to transform the question of “social reform” into a political one: “It is wrong to say that the problem of the Untouchables is a social problem...it is a problem of securing to a minority liberty and equality of opportunity at the hands of a hostile majority, which believes in the denial of liberal and equal opportunity to the minority and conspires to enforce its policy on the minority...the problem of the Untouchables is *fundamentally* a political problem.”<sup>120</sup> In fact, Ambedkar’s proposals for separate electorate and constitutional safeguards for the minorities were designed precisely to *politically* resist the power of the communal majority. Given the absence of a common peoplehood, the co-existence of the majority and the minority in the state as representatives of a not-yet one people seemed to him to be a preferable solution. In other words, Ambedkar’s strong commitment to popular unity paradoxically reinforced a turn to agonism.<sup>121</sup>

As the problem of popular backwardness in time was partially overcome with Nehru, Ambedkar’s critique of the idea of independence laid bare the danger of reducing the boundary problem to the discourse of development. More than any other anticolonial thinker, Ambedkar prefigured the crisis of postcolonial politics; his pessimism led to a scathing diagnosis of the limits of economic and developmental projects of the postcolonial state. His keen interpretation of anticolonial politics found its vindication in the partition of India. The Muslim demand for a separate sovereign state, after all, was anchored in the argument that Hindus and Muslims would

---

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, B.R. Ambedkar, “I Don’t Want Just Freedom But A Complete Independence,” in *Ambedkar Speaks* vol. 3, ed. Narendra Jadhav (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2013), 331.

<sup>120</sup> Ambedkar, *What Gandhi and Congress have Done to the Untouchables*, 190 (emphasis added).

<sup>121</sup> On Ambedkar’s agonism, see Shruti Kapila, “Ambedkar’s Agonism: Sovereign Violence and Pakistan as Peace,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 39, no. 1 (2019): 184-195.

always splinter the people into its communal parts. As is well known, Ambedkar ultimately not only participated in the founding of postcolonial India but was one of its central figures as the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. Though his proposal for separate electorates was not taken up, the Indian constitution legally abolished untouchability and his program for “constitutional safeguards” found a limited expression in the reservation of electoral seats for lower caste groups. Through different routes, Ambedkar and Nehru bolstered the sovereignty of the central state within the federal structure of postcolonial India.<sup>122</sup> Whereas Nehru wanted to institute centralized sovereignty to shepherd the process of planning, Ambedkar’s immediate concern was to institute centralized safeguards for minorities against the danger of localized majoritarianism.

For all their disagreements, Ambedkar and Nehru, in different ways, came to conceive of independence as a founding without *the* people. Upon the completion of the draft of the Indian constitution, Ambedkar declared that India was still not a nation:

“I remember the days when politically-minded Indians resented the expression “the people of India.” They preferred the expression “the Indian nation.” I am of the opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can [a] people divided into several hundreds of castes be a nation?”<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> For a detailed account of Ambedkar’s reflections on federalism as a constitutional principle, see “Federation Versus Freedom,” in *BAWS*, vol.1, 279-354. On the vision of sovereignty underpinning Ambedkar and Nehru’s conceptions of the unitary state, see Uday Mehta, “Indian Constitutionalism: Crisis, Unity, History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution*, edd. Sujit Choudhry, Madhav Khosla, and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 38-54.

<sup>123</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Three Historical Addresses of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation Research Cell, 1999), 54-55. The terms “people” and “nation” here should be understood in the context of a dispute over cultural unity of Indians. The problem of “politically-minded Indians” with the term “people” resided in its purely descriptive connotation—i.e., a collection of different groups devoid of any pre-existing unity. Ambedkar suggestion did not entail the argument that Indians should aim toward a pre-political cultural

The people—or rather what he earlier called an “amorphous people”—was the inheritance of the new state. The monumental challenge of creating a new people out of a shapeless social—based on the principle of liberty, equality, and fraternity—clouded the epochal moment of postcolonial founding for Ambedkar. Nehru, who presided over the Indian founding, continued to starkly contrast the “starving masses” of the present with the people of an abundant future. Nehru’s bargain with the future, though more optimistic, was equally mindful of the gap between independence and democracy proper. Throughout his post-independence writings and speeches, Nehru would repeatedly return to the main challenge facing the postcolonial state: the problem of the underdeveloped people. Splitting the concept of democracy into political democracy and economic democracy, Nehru stressed the priority of the latter over the former.<sup>124</sup> To an extent, constitutional democracy was not merely instrumental, for it allowed the people to have control over the making of their destiny.<sup>125</sup> Nehru wanted the people to participate in and embody the spirit of development, but the planned nature of accelerated progress also required a state guided by a sovereign “projection into the future.”<sup>126</sup>

---

unity; it rather concerned the necessity to develop a cohesive community—a people not socially divided across the lines of caste and religion.

<sup>124</sup> Nehru, “Government and the People” in *Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches*, vol. 3, March 1953–August 1957 (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958), 137–144.

<sup>125</sup> The framework of constitutionalism thus cannot fully capture the problem of postcolonial founding. Nehru, in fact, was clear about the non-identity between constitutionalism and the project of planned social transformation, even as he wanted to ensure the harmony between the two. For a constitutionalist interpretation of the project of social transformation, see Madhav Khosla, *India’s Founding Moment: The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

<sup>126</sup> Uday S. Mehta, “The Social Question and the Absolutism of Politics,” *India Seminar* <[https://www.india-seminar.com/2010/615/615\\_uday\\_s\\_mehta.htm](https://www.india-seminar.com/2010/615/615_uday_s_mehta.htm)>

The wait for popular sovereignty was not yet over. The institution of universal suffrage and electoral democracy, at the same time, brought the masses into the fold of postcolonial politics in unforeseen ways.<sup>127</sup> The order that Nehru wanted to maintain until the arrival of the age of abundance would be disrupted by the postcolonial present. The apparent slow pace of progress—and the quick dissolution of the promise of social freedom into mundane governmentality—would radically problematize the Nehruvian developmental regime. I will have more to say about this in the concluding chapter of the project. Meanwhile, the post-War ideal of self-determination—influenced, in part, by the redefinition of independence by globally connected anticolonial thinkers such as Nehru—had incorporated the problem of economic development in its conceptual scope.<sup>128</sup> On the other hand, Ambedkar—once again politically marginalized in postcolonial India—decided to abandon the pursuit of unity from within the Hindu social and converted to Buddhism. Ambedkar then declared that his philosophy of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” was not borrowed from the French Revolution; it is instead “root[ed] in religion,” albeit an egalitarian Buddhism free of the caste order.<sup>129</sup> This pessimistic return to the social was to be the last *political* act of Ambedkar’s career.

---

<sup>127</sup> On this point, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, “‘In the Name of Politics’: Democracy and the Power of Multitude in India,” *Public Culture* 19, no. 1 (2007): 35-57; Sudipta Kaviraj, “Democracy and Development in India,” in *Democracy and Development*, ed. Amiya Kumar Bagchi (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 92–130.

<sup>128</sup> On the importance of the question of economic development in post-WWII accounts of self-determination, see Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 107-75.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analyzing and Fighting Caste* (London: Hurst & Co, 2005), 133. [this excerpt is from a radio broadcast in 1954]

## Conclusion

In his co-authored book *India and Democracy* (1941), the British historian Guy Wint—not unsympathetic to the Indian demand for self-rule—concocted an argument for independence through the voice of an imaginary Indian political thinker of the nineteenth-century mold. Ventriloquizing the Indian thinker, Wint wrote that “progress and parliamentary government are one and the same.” The colonizer and the colonized agree on this point. The only difference was with regard to “the pace of advance.”<sup>130</sup> In Wint’s telling, the anticolonial pursuit of political freedom was not a dispute over the ideal; it only concerned the time of progress to that ideal. In fact, as Stuart Ward has argued, the advent of the discourse of “decolonization” in Europe pertained to the “rationalization” of the loss of empire.<sup>131</sup> The basic premise of Wint’s argument continues to inform the dominant understanding of anticolonial independence and the attendant postcolonial founding. As we have seen in the section on self-determination, the international origin narrative of anticolonial sovereignty assumes that universalization (through “appropriation”) of the right to self-determination resolved—or could resolve—the problem of imperial subjection. I have called it a framework of the belated universal. The explanation of postcolonial founding as a gradual expansion of the universal ideal of free and sovereign statehood elides how the ideal itself had become contaminated by developmentalism in the wake of modern colonialism. The mere negation of colonial rule appeared to anticolonial thinkers themselves as normatively inadequate (if indispensable) and not equivalent to democratic founding.

---

<sup>130</sup> George Schuster and Gary Wint, *India and Democracy* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1941), 93.

<sup>131</sup> Stuart Ward, “European Provenance of Decolonization,” *Past and Present* 230 (2016): 227-260.

Instead, the question of democracy was inextricably tied to the problem of developmentalism, which drove a wedge between the “norm” and “fact” of democracy in the colonial world. The question inherited from the nineteenth century continued to resonate in late colonial India: can India be democratic if the vast majority of its people are socially deprived, splintered, illiterate, and even unaware of the fact that they are the source of sovereignty? Through a new reading of Jawaharlal Nehru’s political thought, I have argued that the demand for independence only acquired urgency when anticolonial sovereignty could be reimagined as an accelerated path to a “real” democracy which lay in the future. Postcolonial founding, therefore, was not merely an extension or belated realization of the universal ideal of independence; it is instead better understood as a bargain with the future—the promise of passage to a democracy-to-come. For the same reason, the predominant understanding of postcolonial founding either as a “vindicationist” narrative or as the institutionalization of nationalist “ideology” misses its distinctive vision of sovereignty.

The question of popular sovereignty has been strangely absent in literature on anticolonial independence, perhaps owing to the predominance of the sociological narrative of elitist maneuver and the diffusionist story of international origin. Notwithstanding this distinctive aspiration of anticolonial sovereignty, the people was at the heart of postcolonial founding— in keeping with the tradition of modern foundings. For postcolonial founders, democracy was not a mere form of government; they were well cognizant of the fact that the ultimate ground of modern democracy is the sovereignty of the people. And yet the figure of the people appeared to them as an elusive entity incongruent with the time of development toward democracy. If the aspiration to exercise sovereign will over the time of development was utopian, it “lived off,” to quote Reinhart Koselleck, “points of connection not only in the realm of the fictive but in the

empirically redeemable present.”<sup>132</sup> As my reading of Nehru has suggested, the utopia of “real political freedom”—freed of social unfreedom—was squarely grounded on the figure of the destitute masses. In the founding narrative, the people thus appeared as the source of sovereignty who authorized the pursuit of “rapid progress” by the planning state. The source of authorization for this founding—the deprived masses—granted sovereignty to a developmental state that would not merely translate or represent its will; it would also work as an agent for the transformation of the people. The narrative of accelerated transition to popular sovereignty was countered by Ambedkar’s cautionary account of a people destined to dissolve into a splintered social. Ambedkar’s proposal to accommodate social conflicts at the political level perspicaciously resisted the assumption that historical development could address inherited social hierarchies such as caste. The still-unfolding history of postcolonial democracy bears witness to the perennial dilemma of reconciling these two faces of the people. The postcolonial wager for democracy was, and still is, a great experiment—a fraught bargain with the future. The sources of its alluring promises and pitfalls are to be found through “ransacking the archive” (to use Arendt’s metaphor) of its own founding(s).<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “The Temporalization of Utopia,” in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 88.

<sup>133</sup> Arendt, in turn, borrowed the expression from James Harrington to describe eighteenth-century founders’ search for guidance in the Roman antiquity. See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2 (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1978), 210.

## Epilogue

### *The Futures of Anticolonial Democratic Thought*

When the wave of decolonization hit British India and fatefully splintered it into two new states in 1947, the postcolonial founders were already aware that their “star of freedom” was shared with the rest of “the east.”<sup>1</sup> Postcolonial foundings were scattered across continents and yet their abiding preoccupations had plenty in common. Much like other modern foundings, the postcolonial founding unfolded when the avenues of sovereign authorization were still beset by contesting claims and the structure of the constituted power remained incipient and unsettled. The French revolutionaries were confronted with the challenging task of translating the will of the people into political acts while re-constituting the torn social bond.<sup>2</sup> The American revolutionaries disputed over the meaning of constitutionalizing popular sovereignty amid extra-constitutional political claims.<sup>3</sup> For the postcolonial founders, the defining problem was the challenge of development. Just as the experience of decolonization was shared across Asia and Africa, so too were the problems inherited. Poverty and famine constituted the background of almost all postcolonial foundings. The new polities were born with uncertain borders; colonial rule had remade and left behind often insurmountable group conflicts. Building new states and writing new constitutions were the order of the day. Still, the imperative of development cast its shadow over every other concern. From New Delhi to Accra, postcolonial regimes understood

---

<sup>1</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “A Tryst with Destiny,” in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru Second Series*, vol. 3, ed. S. Gopal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 136.

<sup>2</sup> See Pierre Rosanvallon, “Revolutionary Democracy,” in *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. Samuel Moyn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 79-116; Kevin Duong, *The Virtues of Violence: Democracy against Disintegration in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> See Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Post-Revolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

the monumental responsibility of development to be their defining project. On the eve of the Indian independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, while addressing the question of industrialization, observed: “We must cover in five or ten years what other countries took generations to do and at the same time carry millions with us, not by compulsion or in any authoritarian way but with their consent.”<sup>4</sup> The new states would be preoccupied with planning their developmental future in India and elsewhere. Kwame Nkrumah launched an ambitious Seven-Year-Plan in Ghana, while Julius Nyerere of Tanzania declared that “freedom and development are as completely linked together as are chickens and eggs!”<sup>5</sup>

This was an entirely new chapter in the modern history of democracy. In the Euro-American world, the obsolescence of the older notion of democracy—a people directly ruling over itself—had much to do with the emergence of the people as a representational figure. The modern diagnosis that the scattered and numerous people could not be assembled in one place led to the institution of a distinction between sovereignty and government, paving the way for the rise of representative democracy.<sup>6</sup> Postcolonial democracy inherited the representational ambiguity of modern peoplehood, but it also had a challenge of its own: the people appeared to be not just spatially unassembled but also temporally short of the demands of popular sovereignty. Postcolonial founders were well aware of the historical significance of overthrowing

---

<sup>4</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works Second Series*, vol. 1, 587.

<sup>5</sup> Julius Nyerere, “Freedom and Development,” in *Man and Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 25. This was broadly true for the generation of postcolonial founders in Africa. As Frederick Cooper put it: “No word captures the hopes and ambitions of Africa’s leaders, its educated populations, and many of its farmers and workers in the post-war decades better than “development.” See Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91.

<sup>6</sup> On the difference between “ancient” and “modern” notions of democracy and the transition to representative government, see Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

imperial sovereignty and vindicating the anticolonial norm of the equality of peoples. Yet, they also understood, as we have seen in Chapter 5, that the end of colonial rule did not amount to democracy. The developmental state was thus tasked with the goal of making the people one with itself. To quote Nyerere again: “For the truth is that development means the development of *people*. Roads, buildings, the increases of crop output, and other things of this nature are not development: they are only tools of development.”<sup>7</sup> The outstanding question, once again, was: how could democracy simultaneously be the rule of and by the very demos that was to be transformed?

Jawaharlal Nehru distinguished between “political” and “economic” democracy to designate the two prongs of postcolonial democracy. “Economic democracy” referred to the domain of planning—an accelerated development of the social. The adjective “economic” was only a shorthand: it stood for the entire process of infrastructural growth to the educational and cultural remaking of the people.<sup>8</sup> “Political democracy,” on the other hand, concerned the constitutional and electoral dimensions. The balance between “political” and “economic” democracy was rather fragile, as the unraveling of the hope for an accelerated journey through the treacherous road of historical development soon demonstrated. In postcolonial India, the developmental project entrenched the hold of a technocratic form of democracy, while, in many other postcolonial states, economic development became a pretext to suspend or curtail “political” democracy.

---

<sup>7</sup> Nyerere, “Freedom and Development,” 26 (original emphasis).

<sup>8</sup> Nikhil Menon, “Help the Plan—Help Yourself: Making Indians Plan-Conscious,” in *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia*, eds. Gyan Prakash, Michael Laffan, and Nikhil Menon (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) 221-242.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the postcolonial present appeared to be a graveyard of utopia to scholars of anticolonial history: “The [anticolonial] horizon...has collapsed. It is now a superseded future, one of our futures past.”<sup>9</sup> Even as the utopian project of social transformation has collapsed and the memory of imperial subjection has faded, postcolonial democracy continues to amble through the ruins of anticolonial futures. While no declaration was made of their arrival, the postcolonial peoples have been a part and parcel of the messy operation of democracy. Instead of shaping the people, developmental projects themselves began to be shaped by popular politics.<sup>10</sup> Democracy and development are still the quotidian concerns of postcolonial governance and resistance, though they are no longer tethered to the promise of an idealized future of abundance. The history of the anticolonial democratic project presented in this dissertation shows that the now-dominant connotation of economic development is ultimately rooted in the developmental picture of the globe that emerged in the nineteenth century. Developmentalism fundamentally shaped the democratic horizon of expectation that took shape in the colonial period in the process of bringing the globe under a one-and-unified framework. The anticolonial grappling with the problem, as we have seen in the foregoing chapters, generated both political and theoretical possibilities for responding to the imperial reordering of the world. It would thus be fitting to conclude the dissertation by way of reflecting on the postcolonial career of democracy and the legacies that anticolonial thinkers left behind for modern political thought.

---

<sup>9</sup> David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 210.

<sup>10</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 214-219; see also Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

## **The Anticolonial Moment in the History of Modern Political Thought**

Of all the major modern intellectual traditions, none perhaps can claim to have the same level of global purchase as the concepts and categories of political thought. Democracy, popular sovereignty, constitutionalism and their cognate concepts have been governing political institutions and reasoning all over the world at least since the imperial “unification” of the globe in the nineteenth century. And yet political theory as a discipline has been among the last to reckon with the political thought from the colonial and postcolonial world. The disciplinary marginality of the history of modern non-European political thought has more than representational consequences. It obscures the global life of political thought from its modern disciplinary scope, which, in turn, impoverishes the understanding of the global condition that shaped so much of modern political thought—both European and non-European. As I have argued in Chapter 5, one important methodological reason behind the marginalization of anticolonial thought has been the hold of the framework of the “belated universal”: the widespread assumption that the goals of the anticolonial democratic project were already normatively validated ideals elsewhere. The theoretical contributions of anticolonial political thought thus often fail to be translated beyond the representational space.

The undermining of the theoretical scope of anticolonial political thought is no less characteristic of historical studies of anticolonialism. The predominance of the framework of nationalism meant that the archive of anticolonial thought has been read in light of the seemingly inexorable rise of the nation-state. Bipin Chandra Pal’s brief appearance in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*—perhaps the most widely engaged with text in historical scholarship on anticolonial thought—is exemplary of how the anticolonial archive became grist to the mill of

the cultural and social history of nationalism. Anderson turned to Pal—whose work I have discussed in Chapters 3 and 4—to illustrate the limits of anglicization in the British colonies. He focused on Pal’s description of the estrangement of Indian civil service officials from their own society in order to drive home the point regarding the “inner incompatibility of empire and nation.”<sup>11</sup> Having situated the possibility of Pal’s argument in the historical constitution of the British Empire, Anderson strangely—but suggestively—moved on to pluralizing Pal. The internal contradiction of the empire, he noted, “produced thousands of Pals all over the world.” Anderson’s main objective was to establish that “these Pals” could not be accounted for in terms of racism as they also existed in the white colonies.<sup>12</sup> The immediate irony of such a claim lies in the fact that Pal wrote one of the first book-length studies of federalism, which argued against the limited ideal of the nation-state. My concern, however, is not to fault Anderson for his inadequate understanding of Pal or for the larger point that there was an internal contradiction between empire and nation. What is suggestive here is how a foundational anticolonial thinker like Bipin Chandra Pal turned into a mere mirror for tracing the inevitable emergence of nationalism. In the wake of Anderson’s path-breaking work, even scholars critical of Anderson’s account continued to circumscribe anticolonial thought in the world of nationalism and its dilemmas.<sup>13</sup> As a master category, nationalism subsumed the questions of sovereignty,

---

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 93.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Bipin Chandra Pal also made a similar appearance in the most well-known postcolonial critique of Anderson’s text—Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993). Against Anderson’s claim that the nation was a “modular form” that traveled effectively throughout the globe, Chatterjee argued that anticolonial nationalism was split into “inner” and “outer” domains. While the colonized had to choose between different European “models” in the outer domain (i.e., the political domain), they could aspire to exercise sovereignty in the inner domain (e.g., language, family, art). Pal’s description of the student boardinghouses as “small

government, and peoplehood. The success of this approach has been so great that “anticolonial nationalism” came to be a shorthand for anticolonial thought in general. As Adom Getachew has demonstrated in a recent study, anticolonial thinkers, far from being parochial nationalists, actively sought to democratize the international order.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, even “official nationalists” like Nehru and Nkrumah found it difficult to reflect on nationalism without foregrounding its normative limits.

As we have seen in foregoing chapters, anticolonial political thought was neither a delayed restaging of universal questions nor simply a straightforward reflection of the internal contradictions of modern empires. Chapters 1 and 2 have theorized the imperial-global context that Indian anticolonial thinkers inherited in the wake of the developmental turn. I have suggested that the developmental turn was born out of the necessity to think of Europe and the colonies in the same framework. Hegel’s contention that the universal unfolds through world-history captured this paradigmatic condition of political thought after the developmental turn. The universal claim of a given political norm—democracy, for example—had to be validated through its global career. This, however, did not mean that ideas were taken to be selfsame across colonial and metropolitan space. From Hegel to Mill, nineteenth-century European thinkers shored up the universal claim of ideas such as freedom and representative government by developmentalizing their global scope. The assumption that political ideas and institutions develop historically in time had both theoretical and moral implications. While we are now acutely aware of the moral problems of denying self-government to a people because of their

---

republics” served the purpose of illuminating Chatterjee’s argument. Much like Anderson’s account, Pal appeared more as a mirror of history than as a thinker who sought to contest imperial political ideals in theoretical terms. See Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 3-13.

<sup>14</sup> Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*.

putative backwardness, the deeper inheritances of the developmental conception of the globe have remained powerful as ever.

It is in this theoretical context that the profound contribution of anticolonial thinkers to modern political thought should be situated. My contention throughout the dissertation has been that the problem of anticolonialism was not simply about the fact of imperial subjection. Indian anticolonial thinkers understood that modern colonialism derives its legitimacy from a picture of the globe that itself needed to be challenged and recast. They recognized that the source of imperial legitimation lay in—to use, B.N. Seal’s felicitous phrase—the “unilinear” conception of global development. Gandhi’s scathing critique of the discourse of civilization, too, laid bare the developmental framework underlying the imperial promise of representative government. The pursuit of this problem led Indian political thinkers—from Naoroji to Gandhi—to question the relationship assumed between the global and the universal. The challenge, therefore, was to question and overcome the developmental vision of the global. To this end, Naoroji and Dutt theorized how the global structure of development is paradoxically dependent on the exploitation of the colonies. Seal and Mukerjee demonstrated how the logic of development superimposes external standards to render global differences chronological. Gandhi endeavored to theorize political action in opposition to the demand of historical progress. These otherwise different thinkers shared the overarching goal of rendering the so-called colonial backwardness commensurate with the time of democracy.

Instead of taking questions of democracy and the “nation-state” for granted, Indian anticolonial thinkers understood that these political ideals themselves were mired in the narrative of development. As we have seen in the foregoing chapters, the anticolonial reckoning with the developmental vision of the global generated enduring insights into the problem of popular

sovereignty—and democratic theory more broadly. The people arrived in the colonies deferred and idealized. As Indian thinkers critically examined the ideal of popular sovereignty, their developmental predicament offered powerful perspectives into the democratic dilemma of modern peoplehood. The unclaimability of colonial peoplehood attuned anticolonial thinkers to the externalization of popular authority constitutive of the one-and-undivided picture of peoplehood. As the federalists argued with particular clarity, the reimagining of the institutional order of representative democracy requires a rethinking of the monist ideal of popular sovereignty. Bipin Chandra Pal's turn to self-reliance, Gandhi's self-authorizing action, or C.R. Das' diffused self-rule were various attempts at accounting for the temporal lag between (representative) government and (popular) sovereignty. Closer to the moment of postcolonial founding, B.R. Ambedkar's proposal to foreground the boundary of peoplehood as a site of continuous struggle has proved to be prescient, thanks to his keen awareness of the fissiparous social body of the people. Indeed, the assumption that historical development would mend the conflictual borders within the people made postcolonial founders such as Nehru inadequately attentive to the tendency of modern peoplehood to divide itself from within. These reflections on peoplehood, for all their internal tensions and dilemmas, offer valuable resources to grapple with one of the foundational challenges of democratic theory: the necessity to creatively bridge the fraught space between practices of self-rule and the abstract ideal of popular sovereignty.

## Democracy and Development in the Postcolonial Age

The postcolonial age has witnessed a second coming of developmentalism. This has been the result of the confluence of two separate, even politically antagonistic, projects. The roots of the ambitious developmental projects undertaken by the newly independent states lay in the anticolonial aspiration to overcome the developmental unevenness of the modern world. The postcolonial founders across Asia and Africa undertook various forms of economic planning while also seeking to democratize the international order.<sup>15</sup> The first generation of postcolonial statesmen understood very well the interdependence of their national aspirations and the international order. The extraordinary experiments at democratizing the international order—from the Bandung Conference to the New International Economic Order—had generated much hope in the 1950s and 1960s. The undoing of the hope for remaking the international from the 1970s onward came to be matched by domestic political crises throughout the postcolonial world. The sovereignty over the time of development proved to be much harder to accomplish than once anticipated. Authoritarianism abounded and an avalanche of famines, coups and civil wars seemed to have transformed the postcolonial utopia into yet another nightmare.

On the other hand, the international order went through a developmental remaking during these years. With the rise of the “Truman doctrine” in the post-War era, the role of the western nations in a quickly decolonizing world took a new developmental form. The stated goal was no longer the denial of sovereignty, but the promise of peaceful and sustained development of the “underdeveloped” nations. The new international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund institutionalized the developmental discourse, while international

---

<sup>15</sup> Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 2.

law and diplomacy too came to be saturated with developmental reasoning.<sup>16</sup> As the state-led developmental projects foundered by the final quarter of the last century, the Bretton Woods institutions began to dictate the terms of postcolonial “developmental” policies. These endeavors, too, have mostly ended in failures, often resulting in further impoverishment and suppression of postcolonial democracies. James Ferguson has memorably characterized this developmental regime as an “anti-politics machine.” The global developmental apparatus, Ferguson argued, expands and entrenches “bureaucratic state power” while pushing the problem of development outside of the political domain.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the early postcolonial states that hoped to straddle the domains of “political” and “economic” democracy, the global developmental apparatus found it far easier to reduce politics into technocracy. By the end of the twentieth century, its dominance was such that the idea of the “Third World” itself appeared to be “produced” through a developmental lens.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the popular life of developmentalism is far from being dissipated in the postcolonial world. This is hardly surprising. From the colonial period, the role of the masses in democratic politics was articulated in developmental terms. In the era of postcolonial founding, the “rational” planning of the postcolonial state and “irrational” mass politics both relied on

---

<sup>16</sup> On the rise of developmentalism in international law, see Sundhya Pahuja, “From Decolonization to Developmental Nation State,” in *Decolonizing International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 44-94; Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 196-272; on the nineteenth-century origins of historicism in international law, see Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 148-184.

<sup>17</sup> James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xiv.

<sup>18</sup> Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of Theory of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.

developmental claims for democratic legitimation.<sup>19</sup> Underdevelopment is thus not simply a marker of the location of the postcolonial people in a global order; it has instead become “a form of identity,” informing the normative aspirations of popular politics.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, popular politics often acts as a guard against the authoritarianism in the name of development. In postcolonial South Asia and elsewhere, the suspension of popular will for the sake of future development has met with mass resistance.<sup>21</sup> Popular political action more often than not punctuates the time of development.<sup>22</sup> The juridical institution of popular sovereignty was not inconsequential either. It enabled popular claim-making in the legal domain, facilitating a form of popular constitutionalism that bypassed the developmental governmentality of the postcolonial state.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the rise of constitutionalism in postcolonial India has been closely related to the emergence of “mass destitution” as a foundational source of judicial authorization.<sup>24</sup>

Its checkered career notwithstanding, developmentalism continues to hold sway not just institutionally but also normatively. This is because the appeal of developmentalism ultimately

---

<sup>19</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 219.

<sup>20</sup> Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> On this point, see Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury, *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019); for a reading of postcolonial democracy as a tension between conflicting aspirations of development and popular “empowerment,” see Jeffrey Witsoe, *Democracy against Development: Lower-Caste Politics and Political Modernity in Postcolonial India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> See Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Rajnitir Rasta: Path Abarodh o Ganatantra” [The Road of Politics: Road Blockade and Democracy] in *Itihashe Janajiban o Ananya Prabandha* [The Public Life of History and Other Essays] (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2011), 79-91.

<sup>23</sup> See Rohit De, *A People’s Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Sayantan Saha Roy, “Legal Lives in the Post-Colony: Sovereignty, Absolutism, and the Rule of Law in India” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2019).

transcends concrete policies and their outcomes. At a more fundamental level, problems such as postcolonial poverty continue to be globally legible in terms of relative historical backwardness or forwardness. The poverty of poor peasants of a third world country does not simply appear as destitution in absolute terms; they also embody a historical space which becomes cognizable vis-à-vis the relative wealth of the first world. Even as imperial uses of backwardness have become easier to disavow, this deeper commitment to developmentalism has proved to be far more resistant. In spite of the dubious record of reconciling (postcolonial) democracy and development, powerful normative defenses have been mounted for wedding development to democracy. While not uncritical of the global developmental apparatus, Amartya Sen has offered perhaps the strongest normative case for persisting with the developmental framework. For Sen, poverty should be understood as the deprivation of “basic capabilities” rather than as merely low income.<sup>25</sup> His argument is directed against the view that development stands in contradiction with freedom—that authoritarian regimes are best suited for economic development (what is known as the “Lee thesis,” after the former Singaporean prime minister Lee Kuan Yew). The Lee thesis, of course, is the postcolonial reincarnation of an older argument that goes back to nineteenth-century liberal imperialism. Sen finds no justification for making a choice between economic development and political democracy, since it is only in a democracy that the right kind of development flourishes.<sup>26</sup>

From a different intellectual tradition, Thomas McCarthy has made another representative case for continuing with development. McCarthy is aware of the violent history of developmentalism and its deep entanglement with imperialism. Still, it is no less true, McCarthy

---

<sup>25</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

argues, that “the idea of human development is not exhausted by the misuse to which it has been put; that there is much more than a kernel of truth in the view that human history evinces considerable advances in learning, problem solving, practical reasoning, functional differentiation, economic production, the rule of law, political organization, and other respects.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, “developmental thinking is irrepressible,” and constitutes an “inescapable” fact of the modern world.<sup>28</sup> The question is no longer if societies should choose to modernize or not, for it is already a *fait accompli*. It is rather about “which forms of modernity to develop, in light of structural constraints and pressures emanating from the global system.”<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, McCarthy’s primary commitment to a progressive philosophy of history is not entirely based on descriptive reasons. The achievement of “multicultural universalism” requires “multiple forms of sociocultural modernity [to be] united by an overlapping consensus.”<sup>30</sup> On this view, the possibility of a globally valid democracy is ultimately dependent on a thin but normatively valuable framework of developmentalism.

Together, the normative and political persistence of a developmental vision of postcolonial democracy reveals its paradigmatic status in the global life of political modernity. Offering a conceptual genealogy of how development and democracy came together in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been a major aim of the dissertation. I have argued in Chapter 1 that the developmental resolution of colonial difference was central to the emergence of the modern vision of “one world, one time.” This way of developmentally rendering the world thinkable conditions not just pro-imperial thought but also a good deal of modern anti-imperial

---

<sup>27</sup> Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 241-2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 221, 242.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

thought— European and non-European. Chapters 2 and 3 have showed how developmentalism had been constitutive of conceptions of democracy in colonial India. The figure of the people came to be the bearer of historical backwardness and the normative ground of developmental reasoning. As the order between sovereignty and government was reversed in the colonial world, the very framework of political rule came to be dominated by the project of developing the masses into the people. The anticolonial attempts at negotiating with and overcoming the developmental terms of the problem of peoplehood spanned the nineteenth century to the era of decolonization. I have suggested that the recalcitrance of development is rooted in two interrelated sources: the problem of peoplehood and the underlying conception of the globe as a hierarchically unified entity.

As Amy Allen has pointed out, the discourses of developmental progress have both descriptive and normative dimensions.<sup>31</sup> The normative hope invested in the idea of development is often, as in McCarthy's account, directly related to its status as a "fact" of the world. In the nineteenth century, the developmental justification of colonialism was predicated on the theoretical move that rendered norms (self-government) dependent on the fact of development. Unlike Mill, McCarthy, of course, is critical of the imperial uses of development; the fact of development is rather meant to support the norm of global democracy. Furthermore, its philosophically foundational status meant that development could, at once, inform imperialism and anti-imperialism—or authoritarianism as well as popular action. There is thus a temptation to reduce the problem of development to the issue of choosing between its normatively desirable and undesirable elements. In contrast, the lessons that this dissertation has sought to derive from

---

<sup>31</sup> Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

anticolonial resources point toward the necessity of questioning the descriptive claim of developmentalism. The deferral of political action experienced by Tilak and Pal, as we have seen in Chapter 3, had been unavoidable despite their anti-imperialism. Likewise, the Nehruvian undermining of the present people for its future abundance emanated from what he considered to be the descriptive fact of development. In our own present, developmentalism remains undisplaced in the quotidian rhetoric of empire.<sup>32</sup> The celebrated lens of the one world fractures from within, dividing the world in hierarchical times of democracy.

The struggles of postcolonial democracy to reconcile institutional developmentalism with popular sovereignty is suggestive of the difficulty to disentangle the “fact” and “norm” of development. Sen’s case for development, for example, has no explicit commitment to the historicist narratives of development. His argument is rather that dual exercise of development and democracy expands the scope of “freedom”—social, political, and economic. Yet, by re-signifying poverty as the developmental lack of capability, we open ourselves to the possibility of a developmental comparison between different capabilities. This is, after all, why the “backward” peoples were deemed unfit for democracy. To be sure, Sen’s argument is predicated on the assumption that democracy, understood as representative electoral democracy, should not be dependent on capabilities. But insofar as democracy is seen as something that develops capability, Sen’s framework offers little in the way of resisting its reversal: that democracy too requires certain “capabilities” of the people prior to its full self-realization.

The rejection of the developmental prerequisite of democracy is thus not enough. What the critical tradition within Indian political thought teaches us is that the developmental

---

<sup>32</sup> See Jeanne Morefield, *Empires with Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

description of the world is a source of heteronomy precisely because of its tendency to summon political authorization from an idealized future inaccessible to democratic politics. It is worth remembering that the developmental unevenness of the world is a product of the colonial remaking of the globe—as Naoroji and Dutt argued in the nineteenth century, and as has been substantiated further by a host of anticolonial thinkers in the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> The attendant urge for “catching up” with the developed world is a process no less fraught with danger. The conception of postcolonial democracy as a vehicle of development splits the people into its impoverished present authority and the developed future authority. Much like the broader utopian visions of a people one with itself, development simultaneously generates a longing for an abundant future and undercuts the richness of the present. What Patchen Markell has observed with regard to the “democratic consummation of the fantasy of recognition” is no less true for the all-pervading fantasy of a consummated development: “a dream of the moment at which ruler and ruled, seer and seen, become identical.” Such visions of a consummated future run the risk of conflating democracy with “mastery and control.”<sup>34</sup> In the colonial context, the pursuit of sovereignty had often appeared as the ability to dictate the trajectory of historical development. As a result, the time of democracy tends to become eclipsed by the desire to master the road to the future. I have argued that an animating concern with a democracy not blackmailed by the future marked the critical tradition of Indian political thought—especially Gandhi and the federalists. Insofar as the question of development is unavoidable, it is crucial to remember their lesson that the source of development should be located in the people themselves. The federalist proposal to understand development as a “self-expression” of the people rather than as an

---

<sup>33</sup> For a classic twentieth-century account, see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018 [1972]).

<sup>34</sup> Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 188.

authorization from the “higher” realm of historical development captured the preeminent importance of subjecting development to democracy. Unlike the federalists who often fell back on organicist narratives of development, the postcolonial era has a superior resource: the anticolonial precedent—or, to put it in the Gandhian parlance, the “example”—of the pursuit of a people not out of joint with its time.

The interpretations of anticolonial political thinkers presented in the preceding pages have tried to avoid the familiar trope of taking their thought merely as an answer to the moral deficit of empire. What the rich history of anticolonial democratic thought demands—and what this dissertation has tried to be guided by—is a “patience for paradox.”<sup>35</sup> Anticolonial democratic thought carried the burden of the globe on its shoulder. In the process of rendering most of the world subject, modern colonialism threw the cherished ideals of democracy and popular sovereignty into sharp relief. Responding to the challenge, anticolonial thinkers foregrounded the insight that the enactment of democracy in the colonial world requires the overcoming of empire as well as the political ideals imprisoned in the developmental picture of the globe. For postcolonial democracies, the history of anticolonial democratic thought, much like any other history of ideas, is more of a resource than a blueprint. For the modern history of political thought, it remains an archive to mine for understanding how modern democracy came to be as it is and a constant reminder not to take the globe for granted.

---

<sup>35</sup> Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 220.

## **Bibliography:**

### Newspapers and periodicals:

*The Independent* (Center for Research Libraries, Chicago)

*Mahratta* (Nehru Memorial Archive and Museum, New Delhi)

*The Morning Chronicle* (Regenstein Library, Chicago)

*The Indian Sociologist* (British Library, London)

*The Indian Opinion* (electronic archive)

*Young India* (electronic archive)

### Primary Sources (Bengali):

Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra. *Anandamath* [The Abbey of Bliss]. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1983.

Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra. *Bankim Rachanabali* [Collected Works of Bankim]. Vol. 2. Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 1954 [1361].

Das, Chittaranjan. *Deshabandhu Rachanasamagra* [Collected Works of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan]. Kolkata: Tuli-kalam, 1977.

Ghose, Aurobindo. *Writings in Bengali and Sanskrit*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2017.

Mukerjee, Radhakamal. *Manomay Bharat*. Kolkata: Indian Book Club, 1924 [1914].

Guha Roy, Nagendrakumar, ed., *Swaraj Sadhanay Bangali* [Bengali in Pursuit of Swaraj]. Kolkata: Saraswati Library, 1922.

Pal, Bipin Chandra. *Nabajuger Bangla* [The Bengal of the New Age]. Kolkata: Bipin Chandra Pal Institute, 1964.

Roy, Rammohun. *Rammohan Rachanabali* [Collected Works of Rammohun]. Kolkata: Rammohan Mission, 2008.

Sarkar, Benoy Kumar., *Benoy Sarkarer Baithake* [In the Salon of Benoy Sarkar]. Vol. 1. Kolkata: Chakrabarty, Chatterjee & Co. Ltd., 1944.

Seal, Brajendranath. *Bangla Rachana* [Bengali Writings]. Kolkata: Patralekha, 2013.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Chitra*. Kolkata: Kalidas Chakrabarty, 1896.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Rabindra Rachanabali* [Collected Works of Rabindranath Tagore]. Vol. 17. Kolkata: Visvabharati Granthalay, 2000.

Primary Sources (Marathi):

Tilak, Bal Gangadhar. "Mill and Morley" in *Samagra Lokamanya Tilak* vol. 2 (Pune: Kesari Prakasana, 1974), 910-914.

Primary Sources (English: Published and Unpublished):

Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Edited by S. Anand. New Delhi: Navanaya, 2014.

Ambedkar, B.R. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*. 17 vols. New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014.

Ambedkar, B.R. *Three Historical Addresses of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*. New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation Research Cell, 1999.

Arnold, Edwin. *Marquis of Dalhousie's Administration of British India*. Vol. 2. London: Saunders, Otley & Co, 1865.

Banerjea, Surendranath. *A Nation in Making: Being the Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life*. London: Oxford University Press, 1925.

Banerjea, Surendranath. *Speeches and Writings of Babu Surendranath Banerjea, 1876-1880*. Calcutta: Bose Press, 1880.

Banerjea, Surendranath. *Speeches and Writings of Hon. Surendranath Banerjea*. Madras: G.A. Natesen & Co, 1917.

Bosanquet, Bernard. *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1965.

Buch, Maganlal. *The Rise and Growth of Indian Liberalism*. Baroda: Atmaram Press, 1938.

Crawfurd, John. "On the Physical and Mental Characteristics of the European and Asiatic Races of Man." In *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 5, 58-81. London: John Murray, 1867.

- Dadabhai Naoroji, "Observations on Mr. Crawford's Paper on the European and Asiatic Races, read before the Ethnological Society on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1886." In *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* vol. 5, 127-150. London: John Murray, 1867.
- Das, C.R. "Welcome to *The Independent*." *The Independent*, Sunday, February 9, 1919.
- Das, C.R. *Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan: Brief Survey of Life and Work, Provincial Conference Speeches, Congress Speeches*. Calcutta: Rajen Sen, B.K. Sen, 1926.
- Das, C.R. *Freedom Through Disobedience*. Madras: Arka Publishing House, 1922.
- Das, C.R. *India for Indians*. Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1917.
- Das, C.R. *Outline Schemes of Swaraj*. Kolkata: Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of West Bengal, 1973.
- Desai, Mahadev. *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*. Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh, 1968.
- Dutt, R.C. *England and India: A Record of Progress During a Hundred Years 1785-1885*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1897.
- Dutt, Romesh Chunder. *The Economic History of India*. London: Kegan Paul & Co, 1901.
- Fazl, Abul. *The History of Akbar*. Vol. 5. Translated by Wheeler M. Thackston. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Franz Boas, "The Instability of Human Types." In *Papers on Inter-racial Problems*, edited by G. Spiller, 99-103. London: P.S. King & Son, 1911.
- Gandhi, M. K. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), 98 volumes. New Delhi, Publications Division Government of India, 1998.
- Gandhi, M.K. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, edited by Anthony Parel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Gandhi, M.K. *The Gospel of Selfless Action or the Gita According to Gandhi*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1946.
- Ghose, Aurobindo. *Bande Mataram: Political Writings and Speeches*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2002.
- Gierke, Otto von. *Community in Historical Perspective*, edited by Antony Black. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Gierke, Otto von. *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*. Vol. 1. Translated by Ernest Barker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934.

- Bodin, Jean. *Six Books of the Commonwealth* trans. Mark Tooley. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955.
- Gierke, Otto von. *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*. Translated by F.W. Maitland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900.
- Grant, Charles. "Letter from the Right Hon. Charles Grant, MP to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the East India Company." In *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India: A Selected from Records, 1775-1845*, edited by Jatindra Kumar Majumdar, 381-385. Calcutta: Art Press, 1941.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox and Richard Kroner. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* vol. 1, edited by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. Translated by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Jinnah, Muhammad Ali. *Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: Speeches, Statements, Writings, Letters, etc.*, edited by Muhammad Haneef Shahid. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1976.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, edited by Pauline Kleingeld. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Laski, Harold. "The Theory of Popular Sovereignty." *Michigan Law Review* 17, no. 3 (1919): 201-15
- Laski, Harold. *Authority in the Modern State*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*. In *Collected Works of V.I. Lenin* ed. J. Katzer, 393-454. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964.
- Macaulay, T.B. *Macaulay: Prose and Poetry*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Macaulay, T.B. *Miscellaneous Writings of Lord Macaulay*. Vol. 1. London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860.
- Macaulay, T.B. *Speeches and Poems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1874.

- Madan Mohan Malaviya, *Speeches and Writings of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya* (Madras: G.A. Natesen & Co., 1918).
- Majumdar, Bimanbehari. *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*. Calcutta: Bookland Private Ltd., 1967 [1934].
- Mill, James. "Mill to Ricardo (14 August 1819)" in *The Work and Correspondence of David Ricardo* Vol. 8, 52-3. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005.
- Mill, James. *History of British India*. 5 vols. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826.
- Mill, John Stuart and Auguste Comte. *The Correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte*. Translated by Oscar A. Haac. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995.
- Mill, John Stuart. "First Draft of a Court of Directors' Public Department Dispatch to India." In *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843*, edited by Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir, 225-243. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999.
- Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty and the Subjection of Woman*. NY: Henry Holt & Co., 1879.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Vol. I, *Autobiography and Literary Essay*. Edited by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Volume XXI, *Essays on Equality, Law, and Education*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Volume XIX, *Essays on Politics and Society Part II*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Volume X, *Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Volume VIII, *A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive, Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation (Books IV-VI and Appendices)*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Volume XII, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848 Part I*. Edited by Francis E. Mineka. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963.

- Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Volume XVIII, *Essays on Politics and Society Part I*. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977.
- Montesquieu, Charles de. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
- Mukerjee, Radhakamal. "Caste and Social Change in India," *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 3 (1937): 377-390.
- Mukerjee, Radhakamal. *India, the Dawn of a New Era: An Autobiography*. New Delhi: Radha Publications, 1997.
- Mukerjee, Radhakamal. *Principles of Comparative Economics*. Vol. 2. London: P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1922.
- Mukerjee, Radhakamal. *The Community of Communities*. Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers,
- Mukerjee, Radhakamal. *The Oneness of Mankind*. London: MacMillan, 1965.
- Naik, J.V. *Indian Liberalism: A Study, 1918-1943*. Bombay: Padma Publications, 1945.
- Naoroji, Dadabhai. *Essays, Speeches, and Writings on Indian Politics*. Bombay: Caxton Printing Works, 1887.
- Naoroji, Dadabhai. *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1901.
- Naoroji, Dadabhai. *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. London: Swan Sonnenschein Co., 1901.
- Naoroji, Dadabhai. *Speeches and Writings of Dadabhai Naoroji*. Madras: G.A. Nathesen & Co., 1917.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *A Bunch of Old Letters: Written Mostly to Jawaharlal Nehru and Some Written by Him*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches 1949-53*. Vol. 2. Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1954.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches, 1953-1957*. Vol. 3. Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru Second Series*. Vol. 3. Edited by S. Gopal. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.

- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Vol. 1. Edited by S. Gopal. Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Vol. 2. Edited by S. Gopal. Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Vol. 3. Edited by S. Gopal. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Operation, 1972.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Unity of India*. New York: John Day INC, 1942.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Glimpses of World History*. London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd., 1939 [1934]).
- Nehru, Motilal. "Let your Indignation Flame." *The Independent*, Wednesday February 5, 1919.
- Nyerere, Julius. *Man and Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Pal, Bipin Chandra. *Nationality and Empire: A Running Study of Some Current Indian Problems*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink & Co., 1916.
- Pal, Bipin Chandra. *Swadeshi and Swaraj*. Calcutta: Yugayatri Prakashak, 1954.
- Pal, Bipin Chandra. *The Brahma Samaj and the Battle for Swaraj in India*. Kolkata: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1945.
- Pal, Bipin Chandra. *The National Congress*. Lahore: The Tribune Office, Anarkali, 1887.
- Pal, Bipin Chandra. *Writings and Speeches of Bipin Chandra Pal vol. 1*. Calcutta: Yugayatri Prakashak Limited, 1954.
- Paul Hirst (ed.), *The Pluralist Theory of the State: Selected Writings of G.D.H. Cole, J.N. Figgis and H.J. Laski*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Rai, Lala Lajpat. *Self-Determination for India*. NY: India Home Rule League, 1919.
- Ritter, Carl. *Comparative Geography*. New York: American Book Company, 1865.
- Roy, M.N. "The Situation in India: The Report of Comrade Roy." In *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Communist International: As Reported and Interpreted by the Official Newspapers of Soviet Russia*, 42-44. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920.
- Roy, Rammohun. "Extracts from a Letter on Grant's Jury Bill." In *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy Part IV*, edited by Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman, 39-41. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1947.

- Roy, Rammohun. *The English Works of Rammohun Roy* edited by Jogesh Chunder Ghose. Allahabad: Panini Office, 1906.
- Roy, Rammohun. *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (A Gift to Monotheists). Calcutta: S.K. Lahiri & Co., n.d.
- Sarkar, Benoy Kumar. "Chittaranjan Das and Young Asia." In *The Political Philosophies since 1905*, 333-373. Madras: B.G. Paul & Co., 1928.
- Sarkar, Benoy Kumar. "Democratic Ideals and Republican Institutions in India." *American Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (1918): 581-606.
- Sarkar, Benoy Kumar. "Hindu Theory of International Relations." *American Political Science Review* 13, no. 3 (1919): 400-414
- Seal, Brajendranath. "B.N. Seal to W. Rothenstein," 4<sup>th</sup> January 1916, British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, MSS EUR/B/213/42.
- Seal, Brajendranath. "Meaning of Race, Tribe, Nation." In *Papers on Inter-racial Problems*, edited by G. Spiller, 1-13. London: P.S. King & Son, 1911.
- Seal, Brajendranath. *Comparative Studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity and an Introduction on the Historico-Comparative Method*. Calcutta: Hare Press, 1899.
- Seal, Brajendranath. *New Essays in Criticism*. Calcutta: Som Brothers, 1903.
- Seal, Brajendranath. *Raja Rammohun Roy*. Kolkata: Banglar Mukh, 2018.
- Sieyès, Emmanuel-Joseph. *Political Writings* ed. Michael Sonenscher. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003.
- Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. New York: The Modern Library, 1937.
- Smith, Adam. *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982.
- Stephen, James Fitzjames. 'Liberalism', *Cornhill Magazine*. 5 (Jan. 1862): 70–83.
- Telang, K.T. *Selected Writings and Speeches*. Bombay: K.R. Mitra, 1916.
- Tilak, Bal Gangadhar. "L. Tilak's Letter." *Young India* 2, no. 1 (1920): 3.
- Tilak, Bal Gangadhar. *Bal Gangadhar Tilak: His Writings and Speech*. Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1919.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Vitoria, Francisco de. *Political Writings*. Edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Wilson, Woodrow. "The Ideals of America." *Atlantic Monthly* 15 (December 1902): 721-734.

Wilson, Woodrow. "Fourteen Points Speech." The Avalon Project,  
<[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp).>

Wilson, Woodrow. *War Addresses of Woodrow Wilson* ed. Arthur R. Leonard. Boston: Ginn and Co., 1918.

*Report of the Proceedings of the second session of the All India Conference of the Moderate Party held at the Town Hall, Calcutta on the 30th and 31st December, 1919 and 1st January, 1920*. Calcutta: 1920.

Bengal Legislative Council. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1924.

#### Secondary Sources (all):

Abizadeh, Arash. "On the Demos and Its Kin: Nationalism, Democracy, and the Boundary Problem." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 4 (2012): 867-882.

Adalet, Begüm. *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.

Alam, Muzaffar and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "Mediterranean Exemplars: Jesuits Political Lessons for a Mughal Emperor." In *Machiavelli, Islam, and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, edited by Lucio Biasori and Giuseppe Marcocci, 105-130. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Allen, Amy. *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Ambirajan, S. "John Stuart Mill and India." In *J.S. Mill's Encounter with India*, edited by Martin I. Moir, Douglas M. Peers, and Lynn Zastoupil, 221-264. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Amin, Shahid. "Gandhi as Mahatma." In *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Chakravorty Spivak, 288-348. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.

- Anghie, Antony. *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Arendt, Hannah. "The Freedom to Be Free." *New England Review*, 38, no. 2 (2017): 56-69.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Jewish Writings*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.
- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Life of the Mind*. 2 vols. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1978.
- Armitage, David. *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Arneil, Barbara. *The Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Bajpai, Rochana. "Liberalism in India: A Sketch." In *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden*, edited by Ben Jackson and Marc Stears, 53-76. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Banerjee, Sukanya. *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Bardhan, Pranab K. *The Political Economy of Development in India*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984.
- Bartelson, Jens. *Visions of World Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Bayly, C.A. *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1930*. London: Longman, 1989.
- Bayly, Christopher. *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. New York: Grove Press, 1954.
- Bell, David. *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism 1680-1800*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Bell, Duncan. *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

- Bell, Duncan. *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Benhabib, Seyla. "Deliberative Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy." *Constellations* 1 (1): 26-52.
- Benhabib, Seyla. *Dignity in Adversity: Human Rights in Troubled Times*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
- Berlin, Isaiah. "The Bent Twig: A Note on Nationalism." *Foreign Affairs* 51, no. 1 (1972): 11-30.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Bernal, Angélica. 2017. *Beyond Origins: Rethinking Founding in a Time of Constitutional Democracy*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bernasconi, Robert. "'The Ruling Categories of the World': The Trinity in Hegel's Philosophy of History and the Rise and Fall of Peoples." In *A Companion to Hegel*, edited by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, 315-331. London: Blackwell, 2011.
- Bernasconi, Robert. "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti." In *Hegel After Derrida*, edited by Stuart Barnett, 51-73. Routledge: London, 2002.
- Bevir, Mark. "Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain." In *Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain* ed. Mark Bevir, 1-20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Bevir, Mark. "The Formation of the All-India Home Rule League." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 3 (1991): 341-356.
- Bilgrami, Akeel. "Gandhi, the Philosopher." *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 39 (2003): 4159-65.
- Biswas, Dilipkumar. *Rammohan-Samiksha*. Kolkata: Saraswata Library, 1983 [Bengali].
- Bond, Dean W. "Hegel's Geographical Thought." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 1 (2014): 179-198.
- Brennan, Jason. *Against Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Brennan, Timothy. *Borrowed Light: Hegel, Vico, and the Colonies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.

- Brown, Judith. *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian politics 1915-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- Brown, Judith. *Nehru: A Political Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.
- Bull, Hedley. "The Expansion of International Society," edited by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.
- Burrow, John, Stefan Collini, and Donald Winch, and John Burrow. *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Canovan, Margaret. *The People*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.
- Cháirez-Garza, Jesús Francisco. "Bound by Hand and Foot and Handed Over to the Caste Hindus: Ambedkar, Untouchability, and the Politics of Partition." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 55, no. 1 (2018): 1-28.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh and Rochona Majumdar. "Gandhi's Gita and Politics As Such." *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 335-353.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "In the Name of Politics': Democracy and the Power of Multitude in India." *Public Culture* 19, no. 1 (2007): 35-57
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture." In *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Afterlives*, edited by Christopher J. Lee, 45-68. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Planetary Crisis and the Difficulty of Being Modern." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2017): 259-282.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Rajnitir Rasta: Path Abarodh o Ganatantra" [The Road of Politics: Road Blockade and Democracy]. In *Itihasheer Janajiban o Ananya Prabandha* [The Public Life of History and Other Essays], 79-91. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2011 [Bengali].
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Chandra, Bipan. *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979
- Chandra, Bipan. *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905*. New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2010.

- Chatterjee, Partha. "Empires, Nations, Peoples: The Imperial Prerogative and Colonial Exceptions." *Thesis Eleven* 139, no. 1 (2017): 84-96.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*. London: Zed Books, 1986.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragment: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Chowdhury, Nusrat Sabina. *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Cohn, Bernard. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Collet, Sophia Dobson. *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Calcutta: A.C. Sarkar, 1913.
- Conti, Gregory. *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation: Representation, Deliberation, and Democracy in Victorian Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Dahl, Adam. *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democracy*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018.
- Dallmayr, Fred. "What is Swaraj? Lessons from Gandhi." In *Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule*, edited by Anthony J. Parel, 103-118. NY: Lexington Books, 2000.
- Dalton, Dennis. *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-Violent Power in Action*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Dasgupta, Sandipto. "Gandhi's Failure: Anticolonial Movements and Postcolonial Futures." *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017): 647-662.

- De, Rohit. *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Devji, Faisal. "Gandhi's Great War." In *India and World War I: A Centennial Assessment*, edited by Roger D. Long and Ian Talbot, 191-206. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Devji, Faisal. *The Impossible Indian*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Dhawan, Gopinath. *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1946.
- Dirks, Nicholas. "The Burden of the Past: On Colonialism and the Writing of History." In *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, 303-316. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Dirks, Nicholas. *Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Dunn, John. *Democracy: A History*. NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005.
- Duong, Kevin. "The People as a Natural Disaster: Redemptive Violence in Jacobin Political Thought." *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 4 (2017): 786-800.
- Duong, Kevin. *The Virtues of Violence: Democracy against Disintegration in Modern France*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Dussel, Enrique. *Twenty-Theses on Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Emerson, Rupert. *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Determination of Asian and African Peoples*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Espejo, Paulina Ochoa. *The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and the Democratic State*. PA: Penn State University Press, 2011.
- Eudin, Xenia J. and Robert C. North. *M. N. Roy's Mission to China: The Communist-Kuomintang Split of 1927*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. NY: Grove Press, 2004.
- Ferguson, James. *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

- Fitzpatrick, Matthew ed. *Liberal Imperialism in Europe*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.
- Follett, Mary Parker. *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.
- Foucault, Michel. *Society Must be Defended*. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Frank, Jason. “‘Unauthorized Propositions’: ‘The Federalist Papers’ and Constituent Power.” *Diacritics* 37, no 2-3 (2007): 103-120.
- Frank, Jason. *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in the Post-Revolutionary America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Frank, Jason. *Publius and Political Imagination*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Getachew, Adom. *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.
- Gilman, Nils. *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Godrej, Farah. “Gandhi, Foucault, and the Politics of Self-Care.” *Theory & Event* 20, no. 4 (2017): 894-922.
- Goswami, Manu. *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Guha, Ranajit. “A Conquest Foretold.” In *The Small Voice History: Collected Essays*, 373-390. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009.
- Guha, Ranajit. “Neel-Darpan: The Image of a Peasant Revolt in a Liberal Mirror.” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 2, no.1 (1974): 1-46.
- Guha, Ranajit. *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Guha, Ranajit. *History at the Limit of World-History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Gupta, Akhil. *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

- Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions Toward a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998.
- Haithcox, John P. "The Roy-Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation." *Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1963): 93-101.
- Halbfass, Wilhelm. "India and the Comparative Method." *Philosophy East and West* 35, no.1 (1985): 3-15.
- Hatcher, Brian. *Idioms of Improvement: Vidyāsāgar and Cultural Encounter in Bengal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Held, David. *Models of Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hobson, John M. *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Hodder, Alan D. "Emerson, Rammohan Roy, and the Unitarians." In *Studies in the American Renaissance*, edited by Joel Myerson, 133-148. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1988.
- Holmes, Stephen. *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Honig, Bonnie. "Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory." *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (2007): 1-17.
- Hyslop, Jonathan. "An "Eventful" History of *Hind Swaraj*: Gandhi between the Battle of Tsushima and the Union of South Africa." *Public Culture* 23, no. 2 (2011): 299-319.
- Inden, Ronald. *Imagining India*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Iyengar, A.S. *Role of the Press and Indian Freedom Struggle: All through the Gandhian Era*. New Delhi: A.P. H. Publishing Corporation, 2001.
- Iyer, Raghavan N. 1973. *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analyzing and Fighting Caste*. London: Hurst & Co, 2005.
- Jenco, Leigh. "Histories of Thought and Comparative Political Theory: The Curious Case of 'Chinese Origins of Western Knowledge,' 1860-1895," *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (2014): 658-681.

- Jenco, Leigh. "Introduction: On the Possibility of Chinese Thought as Global Theory." In *Chinese Thought as Global Theory Diversifying Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences and Humanities*, edited by Leigh Jenco, 1-25. New York: State University of New York Press, 2017.
- Jenco, Leigh. *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Kapila, Shruti. "Ambedkar's Agonism: Sovereign Violence and Pakistan as Peace." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 39, no. 1 (2019): 184-195.
- Kapila, Shruti. "Self, Spencer and Swaraj: Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism, 1890-1920." *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2007): 109-127.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta. "A State of Contradictions: The Post-colonial State in India." In *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas*, 210-233. NY: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Kaviraj, Sudpita. "Democracy and Development in India." In *Democracy and Development*, edited by Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 92-130. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Kedourie, Elie ed. *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*. New York: Meridian Books, 1970.
- Keenan, Alan. *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Kelly, Duncan. "Popular Sovereignty as State Theory in the Nineteenth Century." In *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, edited by Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner, 270-296. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Kloppenber, James T. *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Koditschek, Theodore. *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Kohn, Margaret and Daniel I. O'Neill. "A Tale of Two Indias: Burke and Mill on Empire and Slavery in the West Indies and America." *Political Theory* 34, no. 2 (2006): 192-228.
- Kohn, Margaret and Keally McBride. *Political Theories of Decolonization: Postcolonialism and the Problem of Foundations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. "Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*." *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6 (2011): 1-37.

- Koselleck, Reinhart. "The Temporalization of Utopia." In *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Krouse, Richard. "Two Concepts of Democratic Representation: James and John Stuart Mill." *Journal of Politics* 44, no.2 (1982): 509-537.
- Laborde, Cecile. *Pluralist Thought and the State in Britain and France 1900-1925*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Lee, Daniel. *Popular Sovereignty in Early Modern Constitutional Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Leonhard, Jörn. "From European Liberalism to the Languages of Liberalisms: The Semantics of Liberalism in European Comparison." *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* vol. 8 (2004): 17-51.
- Levin, Norman. *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Livingston, Alex. "Fidelity to Truth: Gandhi and the Genealogy of Civil Disobedience." *Political Theory* 46, no. 4 (2018): 511-536.
- Livingston, Alexander. *Damn Great Empires!: William James and the Politics of Pragmatism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Lorca, Arnulf Becker. "Petitioning the International: A "Pre-History" of Self-Determination." *The European Journal of International Law* 25, no. 2 (2014): 497-523.
- Louro, Michele L. *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Mackinnon, Emma. "Declaration as Disavowal: The Politics of Race and Empire in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *Political Theory* 47, no. 1 (2019): 57-81.
- Maitra, Keya. "Ambedkar and the Constitution of India: A Deweyian Experiment." *Contemporary Pragmatism* 9, no. 2 (2012): 301-320.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Legacy of Colonialism." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 4 (2001): 651-664.
- Manela, Erez. *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

- Mani, Lata. "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 119-156.
- Manin, Bernard. *The Principles of Representative Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Mansbridge, Jane. "Mary Parker Follett: Feminist and Negotiator." In *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government*, xvii-xxviii. PA: Penn State Press, 1998.
- Mantena, Karuna. "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Non-Violence." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 455-470.
- Mantena, Karuna. "Gandhi's Critique of the State: Sources, Contexts, Conjunctures." *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (2012): 535-563.
- Mantena, Karuna. "Mill and the Imperial Predicament." In *J.S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Assessment*, edited by Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras, 298-318. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Mantena, Karuna. "Popular Sovereignty and Anti-Colonialism." In *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, edited by Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner, 297-319. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Mantena, Karuna. *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- March, Andrew. "What is Comparative Political Theory?," *Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 531-565.
- Markell, Patchen. "Domestic Homologies and Household Politics: A Comment on Patricia Owens's *Economy of Force*." *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 3 (2016): 193-200.
- Markell, Patchen. "The Mob, the People, and the Political: Rereading *The Origins of Totalitarianism*" (unpublished manuscript).
- Markell, Patchen. *Bound by Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Marshall, John. "Voltaire, Priestcraft and Imposture: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam." *Intellectual History Review* 28, no. 1 (2018): 167-184.
- Marshall, P.J. "The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century." In *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947*, edited by C.A. Bayly, 16-25. London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1990.

- Marwah, Inder. "Rethinking Resistance: Spencer, Krishnavarma, and *The Indian Sociologist*." In *Colonial Exchanges: Political Theory and the Agency of the Colonized*, edited by Burke Hendrix and Deborah Baumgold, 43-72. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.
- Marwah, Inder. "Two Concepts of Liberal Developmentalism." *European Journal of Political Theory* 15, no. 1 (2016): 97-123.
- Mazumdar, A.C. *The Indian National Evolution: A Study of the Origin and Growth of the Indian National Congress*. New Delhi: Michiko & Panthajan, 1915.
- McCarthy, Thomas A. *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- McCarthy, Thomas. *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- McDowell, John. "Why Does it Matter to Hegel that Geist Has a History." In *Hegel on Philosophy in History*, edited by James Kreines and Rachel Zuckert, 15-32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Meek, Ronald. *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Mehta, Pratap B. "Liberalism, Nation, and Empire: The Case of J.S. Mill." In *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, edited by Sankar Muthu, 232-260. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Mehta, Uday S. "Indian Constitutionalism: Crisis, Unity, History." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Constitution*, edited by Sujit Choudhry, Madhav Khosla, and Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 38-54. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Mehta, Uday S. "The Social Question and the Absolutism of Politics," India Seminar < [https://www.india-seminar.com/2010/615/615\\_uday\\_s\\_mehta.htm](https://www.india-seminar.com/2010/615/615_uday_s_mehta.htm)>
- Mehta, Uday. "Gandhi on Democracy, Politics and the Ethics of Everyday Life." *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (2010): 355-371.
- Mehta, Uday. "Patience, Inwardness, and Self-Knowledge in Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*." *Public Culture* 23, no. 2 (2011): 417-429.
- Mehta, Uday. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Menon, Nikhil. "Help the Plan—Help Yourself: Making Indians Plan-Conscious." In *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia*, edited by Michael Laffan, Nikhil Menon, and Gyan Prakash, 221-242. London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

- Metcalf, Thomas. *Ideologies of the Raj*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Mitchell, Timothy. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. London: Verso, 2011.
- Moore, Adrienne. *Rammohun Roy and America*. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1942.
- Morefield, Jeanne. "Hegelian Organicism, British New Liberalism and the Return of the Family State." *History of Political Thought* 33, no. 1 (2002): 141-170.
- Morefield, Jeanne. *Empires with Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Morefield, Jeanne. "Urgent History: The Sovereignty Debates and Political Theory's Lost Voices." *Political Theory* 45, no. 2 (2017): 164-91.
- Morgan, Edmund. *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. New York: Norton & Co., 1988.
- Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso, 2000.
- Moyn, Samuel. "Fantasies of Federalism." *Dissent* 62, no. 1 (2015): 145–51.
- Moyn, Samuel. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Mukherjee, Arun P. "B.R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy." *New Literary History* 40, no. 2 (2009): 345-370;
- Mukherjee, Mithi. *India in the Shadow of Empire: A Legal and Political History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010)
- Muthu, Sankar ed. *Empire and Modern Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Muthu, Sankar. *Enlightenment Against Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind and David Washbrook. "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (1992): 141-167.
- Olson, Kevin. "Paradoxes of Constitutional Democracy." *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 2 (2007): 330-343.
- Olson, Kevin. *Imagined Sovereignities: The Power of the People and other Myths of the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

- Osterhammel, Jürgen. “‘Peoples without History’ in British and German Historical Thought.” In *British and German Historiography 1750-1950: Traditions, Perceptions, and Transfers* ed. Benedikt Stuchtey and Peter Wende, 265-287. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Osterhammel, Jürgen. *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Owens, Patricia. *The Economy of Force: Counterinsurgency and the Historical Rise of the Social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Pagden, Anthony. *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Pagden, Anthony. *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France 1500-1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pahuja, Sundhya. *Decolonizing International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Parekh, Bhikhu. “Superior People: The Narrowness of Liberalism from Mill to Rawls.” *Times Literary Supplement* 25 (February 1994): 11-13.
- Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi’s Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989.
- Parel, Anthony J. “Editor’s Introduction.” In *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Parel, Anthony J. *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Parel, Anthony J. *Pax Gandhiana: The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Peperzak, Adriaan Theodoor. “Hegel Contra Hegel in His Philosophy of Right: The Contradictions of International Politics.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32, no.2 (1994): 241-263.
- Pippin, Robert. *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

- Pitts, Jennifer. "The Global in Enlightenment Historical Thought." In *A Companion to Global Historical Thought* edited Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy and Andrew Sartori, 184-196. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.
- Pitts, Jennifer. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Pitts, Jennifer. *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Prakash, Gyan. "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism." *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1475-490
- Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus*. NY: Continuum Press, 2010.
- Rao, Anupama. "Deprovincializing Anticaste Thought: A Genealogy of Ambedkar's Dalit." In *The Postcolonial Contemporary: Political Imaginaries for the Global Present*, edited by Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder, 126-46. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.
- Ray, P.C. *The Life and Times of C.R. Das*. London: Oxford University Press, 1927.
- Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Verso, 2018 [1972].
- Rogin, Michael. "Marx Weber and Woodrow Wilson: The Iron Cage in Germany and America," *Polity* 3, no. 4 (1971): 557-575.
- Rosanvallon, Pierre. *Democracy Past and Future*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Rothschild, Emma. "Global Commerce and the Question of Sovereignty in the Eighteenth-Century Provinces." *Modern Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 3-25.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Rubin, Gil. "From Federalism to Binationalism: Arendt's Shifting Zionism." *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 3 (2015): 393-41.
- Rudolph, Lloyd and Susan Rudolph. *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Rudwick, Elliott M. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Universal Races Congress of 1911." *Phylon Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1959): 372-378.
- Runciman, David. *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

- Ryan, Alan. *John Stuart Mill*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970.
- Saha Roy, Sayantan. "Legal Lives in the Post-Colony: Sovereignty, Absolutism, and the Rule of Law in India" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2019).
- Sarkar, Sumit. "Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past." In *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, edited by V.C. Joshi, 46-68. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975.
- Sartori, Andrew. *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Stroud, Scott R. "What Did Ambedkar Learn from John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*?" *The Pluralist* 12, no. 2 (2017): 78-103.
- Scott, David. "'The Word is Love': Michael Manley's Style of Radical Political Will." *Small Axe* 23, no. 1 (2019): 1691-86.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Seal, Anil. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Simon, Joshua. *The Ideology of Creole Revolution: Imperialism and Independence in American and Latin Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Sinha, Mrinalini. *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1995.
- Skaria, Ajay. *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- Stears, Marx. *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problem of the State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Stein, Burton. *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Stokes, Eric. *English Utilitarians and India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. *Europe's India: Words, People, Empires, 1500-1800*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Sumit, Sarkar. *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-08*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black Press, 2010.
- Thompson, Dennis. *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Travers, Robert. *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Tuck, Richard. *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and International Order from Grotius to Kant*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Tuck, Richard. *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume II, Imperialism and Civic Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Turner, Charles. "Organicism, Pluralism and Civil Association: Some Neglected Political Thinkers." *History of the Human Sciences* 5, no. 3 (1992): 175-84.
- Urbinati, Nadia. "The Many Heads of the Hydra: J.S. Mill on Despotism." In *J.S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment*, edited by Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras, 66-97. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Urbinati, Nadia. *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Varouxakis, Georgios. *Mill on Nationality*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Visana, Vikram. "Vernacular Liberalism, Capitalism, and Anti-Imperialism in the Political Thought of Dadabhai Naoroji." *The Historical Journal* 59, no. 3 (2016): 775-797.
- Viswanath, Rupa. *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Ward, Stuart. "European Provenance of Decolonization." *Past and Present* 230 (2016): 227-260
- Warde, Paul. "The Idea of Improvement, c 1520-1700." In *Custom, Improvement, and the Landscape in Early Modern Britain*, edited by Richard Hoyle, 127-148. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.

- Weitz, Eric. "Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right." *American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015): 462-496.
- Whelan, Frederick G. "Prologue: Democratic Theory and the Boundary Problem." *Nomos* 25 (1983): 13-47.
- Wilder, Gary. *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Wilson, Jon. *The Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India, 1780-1835*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Wint, Gary and George Schuster. *India and Democracy*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1941.
- Witsoe, Jeffrey. *Democracy against Development: Lower-Caste Politics and Political Modernity in Postcolonial India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty* edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. London: Harper Torchbooks, 1969.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Wolin, Sheldon. "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy." In *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, edited by Peter Euben and John Wallach, 29-58. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Wolin, Sheldon. 1981. "People's Two Bodies." *Democracy* 1(1): 9-24.
- Wolpert, Stanley. 2001. *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yack, Bernard. "Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism." *Political Theory* 29, no. 4 (2001): 517-536.
- Ypi, Lea. "What's Wrong with Colonialism." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2013): 158-191.
- Zastoupil, Lynn. *Rammohan Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.
- Zerilli, Linda M.G. *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Zerilli, Linda M.G. *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.