A society can understand the relationship between its culture and its state in two ways. The first way is to look for the means by which culture can be made to contribute to the sustenance and growth of the state. The state here is seen as operating according to certain fixed, universal, sociological rules. Elements of the culture that help strengthen the state are seen as good; elements of the culture that do not help the proper functioning of the state or hinder its growth are seen as defective. A mature society, in this view, sheds or actively eliminates these defective elements, to improve both the functioning of the state and the quality of the culture.

The second way of looking at the relationship between culture and the state is to do so from the standpoint of the culture. This approach may regard the state as a protector, an internal critic or a thermostat for the culture but not as the ultimate pacesetter for the society's way of life. The state here is made to serve the needs of or contribute to the enrichment of the culture; it is never allowed to dictate terms to the culture. Even when the state is used as a critique of the culture and the culture is sought to be transformed, the final justification for the criticism and the transformation is not sought in the intrinsic logic of statecraft or in the universal laws of state formation. That justification is sought in the self-perceived needs of the culture and the people and in the moral framework used by the people.

This dichotomy between the state and the culture-oriented views of society, of course, dissolves if one uses the older idea of the state as part and parcel of culture (as obtains in many traditional societies) or if one refuses to accept the modern idea of nation-state as the only genuine
version of state (as is assumed by most modern political and social analysts today). In most nonmodern societies, among people who work with the older idea and not with the modern idea of the nation-state, the culture-oriented approach to state is seen as natural and the state-oriented approach as an imposition. At the same time, in modern societies the nation-state-oriented approach seems natural and rational, and the culture-oriented one unnatural, irrational or primitive. The choice, therefore, boils down to one between the culture-oriented and the nation-state-oriented. Still, for the sake of simplicity, I shall use here the expression state-oriented or statist to mean the nation-state-oriented, hoping that the reader will not confuse this concept of ‘statist’ with that used in debates between the socialist thinkers and the liberals believing in a minimal state.

I am not considering here either the nature of the state or that of culture. These are vital issues which need to be discussed fully. For the moment I wish to avoid them because I want to do justice to the culture-oriented approach that believes that a state can destroy the civilization of which it is a part even when—forgive the anthropomorphism—the intentions of the state are ‘honourable’ and even when it is ‘honestly’ trying to improve a decaying civilization. When a state becomes ethnical, the culture-oriented approach believes, the remedy does not lie merely in capturing the state, since this provides no check against the captured state becoming as ethnical in scope as it was before being captured.

I

For the last 150 years, westernized, middle-class Indians have learnt to look at the first approach—the one that orients the needs of the culture to the needs of the state—as the very epitome of political maturity, achievement and development. Since the nation-state system acquired its present global predominance in the nineteenth century, most political analysis in the West, too, has forgotten the alternative. And since a global science of politics became fully operational after World War II, the state-oriented attitude to culture has become the only way of looking at culture the world over. Nearly all the studies of political development and political culture of the 1950s and 1960s have this cultural-engineering

1In traditional India, for instance, the state was clearly expected to be a part of culture and the king was expected to see himself not only a protector of dharma but also as a protector of multiple ways of life and a promoter of ethnic tolerance. While the Arthashastra may not provide a clue to this, the puranas, the folklore and lokachara do.
component built into them. From Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils and David Easton to Karl Deutsch, Samuel Huntington and Lucian Pye, it is the same story. So much so that, under their influence, modern political analysts and journalists are forced to fall back on state-oriented analytic categories, even after the categories have shown poor interpretative power, as often happens when figures like M.K. Gandhi, Ayatollah Khomeini, Maulana Bhashani and Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (to give random examples) become politically consequential.

This is part of a larger picture. Take, for instance, studies of the cultural contexts of economic growth done during the same period. The main function of culture, according to these studies, was to facilitate economic growth. Aspects of culture that stood in the way of such growth had to be ruthlessly excised. In ‘stagnant’ cultures, that is, in cultures which did not nurture a thriving modern economy, the engineering challenge was to rediscover or introduce cultural elements which would trigger or sustain economic growth and the spirit of the market that went with it. This was the thrust of the psychological studies of achievement motivation done by David McClelland and company, and the studies of Protestant-ethics-like elements in nonwestern cultures by a drove of social anthropologists. Even the tough-minded economists of the period, who did not believe in the relevance of such woolly psychological or cultural anthropological work, never faltered in their belief that a society had to give primacy to the needs of the modern economy, however defined, over the needs of culture. So did the mercenaries among them vending the materialist—read economic—interpretation of history to ensure the centrality of their dismal science in the world of social knowledge. In India, at least, I have not come across a single work of any Marxist economist of the period which challenged the basic priority of economics and sought to restore, even as a distant goal, Marx’s original vision of a society freed from the bondage of economism.²

A similar case can be made about science. Most science-and-culture studies of the 1950s and 1960s sought to make the society safe for modern science. For this purpose, all nonmodern cultures were to be

²One of the first Marxist thinkers in the Third World to explicitly recognize the primacy of culture was Amilcar Cabral (1924–74). See his Return to the Source: Selected Speeches (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973). He, of course, drew upon the work of Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor. One suspects that the African heritage of the three had something to do with their sensitivity. The disintegrating native cultures they saw around them were more threatened than threatening, something which a Mao Zedong could not say about China. In India, unfortunately, even the Marxism of classical scholars like D.D. Kosambi and D.P. Chattopadhyay has remained in essence another version of western Orientalism and colonial anthropology.
retooled and made more rational or modern. Thus, scientific criticisms of culture were encouraged but cultural criticisms of science were dubbed obscurantist. Occasionally, shallow criticisms of the social relations of science were allowed—in the sense that the control over science exercised by imperialism or capitalism or by army generals was allowed to be exposed. But this was done as part of an attempt to protect the text and the core values of modern science which were seen as absolute and as the last word in human rationality. As if, somehow, the forces of violence and exploitation, after taking over much of the context of modern science, hesitated when they encountered the contents of modern science and refused to enter its sanctum sanctorum. Here, too, culture was always at the receiving end, while science kept the company of modern political and economic institutions.

We are however talking of politics at the moment, not of the witchcraft called economics or the mega-corporation called modern science. And I want to suggest that in India the primacy granted to the needs of the state—seen as a necessary part of a ruthless, global, nation-state system—is not a new idea coined in the late 1940s by the first generation of post-Independence managers of the Indian polity. The primacy of the state was not the discovery of Jawaharlal Nehru or Vallabhbhai Patel, two very different persons who arrived at roughly the same statist ideology through very different personal and intellectual paths. Nor did the primacy-of-the-state theory evolve in the 1950s or the 1960s when the structural-functional models of political development and positivist-Marxist models of the state endorsed, at two ends of the political spectrum, its primacy. The new model merely re-legitimized what had been brewing for more than a hundred years in India and, perhaps, for more than three hundred years in Europe.

The statist model first came to India in the nineteenth century, in the second phase of colonialism, when a more reactive, self-defensive Hinduism began to take shape in response to the consolidation of social theories that saw colonialism as a civilizing influence and as a pathway from feudalism to modern statehood.3 It was towards the middle of

---

3 For a discussion of the political consciousness which characterized this phase of colonial politics, and its persistence within the culture of Indian politics as an important strain, see Ashis Nandy, 'The Making and Unmaking of Political Cultures of India', in *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 47–69; and *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).
the nineteenth century that a series of dedicated Hindu religious and social reformers first mooted the idea that what Hinduism lacked was the primacy which most forms of post-medieval, western Christianity granted to the state. Even Islam, they felt, had a built-in space for such primacy. The Hindus did not. That was why, in their view, the Hindus were having it so bad. The sorrow of that generation of reformers was that the Hindu seemed an animal peculiarly hostile and insensitive to the subtleties of the nation-state system; their hope was that the hostility and insensitivity could be corrected through proper cultural and social engineering. This the religious reformers tried to do through a revision of the Hindu personality and way of life.

This effort, because it came as part of a defence of Hinduism, hid the fact that this was the first influential indigenous form of the primacy-of-the-state thesis advanced in India. The thesis, for the first time, brought modern statism within Hinduism, in the sense that the Hindu state of the future was not to be the Hindu polity of the past but a centralized, modern nation-state with a Brahminic idiom. Suresh Sharma’s recent paper on V.D. Savarkar neatly sums up the spirit of this particular form of Hindu nationalism and the political form it later had to take. It is a measure of the cultural tragedy which colonialism was for India that even a person like Savarkar, after spending nearly forty years in intense, often violent, anti-colonial struggle and suffering for it, had ultimately to turn intellectually and culturally collaborationist, purportedly to save the Hindus from Islamic domination with the help of the culturally and politically more ‘advanced’ British.4

The earlier generation of reformers, in what can be called the first phase of British colonialism, had pleaded for greater political participation of Indians and also for greater state intervention in the society. But there were externally imposed limits to their enthusiasm; they did not stress

---

4Savarkar was a product of Marathi nationalism, which sought legitimacy by developing the European-style idea of a common culture, will and a fixed territory with ‘natural’ boundaries. Enrico Pasana, ‘Deshabhakta: The Leaders of Indian Independence Movement in the Eyes of Marathi Nationalists’, Asian and African Studies, 1994, 3(2), pp. 152-75. Also, Suresh Sharma, ‘Savarkar’s Quest for a Modern Hindu Consolidation: The Framework of Validation’, in D.L. Sheth and Ashis Nandy (ed.), Hindu Visions of a Desirable Society: Heritage, Challenge and Redefinitions (forthcoming). Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94) was probably the first well-known theoretician of the state-oriented approach in India. I say ‘probably’ because he stated his position indirectly, often through his literary and theological works or through commentaries on the works of others. Sudipta Kaviraj suggests that Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya (1827-94), a less known contemporary of Bankimchandra, was the first to explicitly accept and plead for a modern nation-state in India.
the absolute primacy of the state, partly because the state was not theirs and partly because even their British rulers had not yet shown any great ideological commitment to the state system they were running. The state for the first generation of British rulers was mainly a means of making money, not a means of cultural engineering. These rulers feared and respected Indian culture, which they tried not to disturb as long as it did not stand in the way of their money-making. Moreover, the Raj occupied a relatively small part of the subcontinent and certainly did not give the impression of being the paramount power in the country. Indians pressurizing their British rulers to intervene in Indian society could not internalize a highly activist or an awesomely grand image of the state.⁵

Nonetheless, the first generation of social reformers had provided the base on which the second generation of reformers built their adoration for the modern idea of the nation-state and their suspicion of all grassroots politics. Certainly, these latter reformers did not put any premium on participatory politics, which they accepted theoretically only as a vague, populist possibility. Even when they spoke of mass politics as desirable, they saw it as something that had to come later — after the Hindu had been morally and educationally uplifted and after he or she had learnt to take on modern responsibilities.⁶ This shielded them from the awareness that they were unwilling or incapable of mobilizing ordinary Indians for basic political changes, including full participation in the anti-imperial struggle.

The votaries of a Hindu nation-state, thinking that they were pleading for a Hindu polity, were also mostly unaware that the nation-state system was one of the more recent innovations in human civilization and that it had come into being only about two hundred years earlier in Europe, in the mid-seventeenth century. They chose to see it as one of the eternal verities of humankind. Naturally, they diagnosed Hindu inadequacy in state-oriented politics as the result of a major defect in the Hindu

⁵There was also probably a feeling among Indians that there should be limits to which a colonial state should be involved by its subjects in the matter of social reform. Consider, for instance, the ambivalence of Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), who worked aggressively for the abolition of the practice of sati but who doubted the wisdom of a state-imposed ban on it.

⁶Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950) in his revolutionary years, when he was under the influence of Mazzini, was a good example of such romantic populism. The hero of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay’s novel Pather Dabi, Sabyasachi, is a faithful idealization of this approach to political participation. The pathological possibilities of the approach have been explored in some detail in Rabindranath Tagore’s novels Cora, The Home and the World and Char Adhyay.
personality and culture, which had to be reformed as the first step to political freedom. (The British in India, for their own reasons, endorsed this priority of the cultural over the political enthusiastically.) Many of these social reformers, inappropriately called Hindu revivalists, were later to have much sympathy for the anti-British terrorist movements. But that sympathy was not accompanied by any passion for wider political participation of the people. Indeed, they were always a little afraid of the majority of Hindus who lived in the 500,000 Indian villages. Hindu rashtra, yes; but not with the full participation of all the Hindu praja, at least not with that of the praja as they were, and certainly not with the participation of all Hindus in the short run. The conspiratorial style of the terrorists was handy here since it automatically restricted mass participation in politics. Even the constant invocation of the Hindu past by the revivalists—the practice which gave them their distinctive name—was a criticism of living Hindus. It was a compensatory act. It hid the revivalists’ admiration for the West and for western Christianity and middle-eastern Islam, seen as martial and valorous, and it hid the desperate search for the same qualities in the Hindu past. The political consequence of this admiration for the conquerors of the Hindus was the continuous attempt by many to re-educate the ‘politically immature’, anarchic, living Hindus, so that the latter could rediscover their lost western and Islamic values and play their proper role in the global system of nation-states. Swami Vivekananda, when he envisioned a new race of Vedantic Hindus who would build a western society in India, was only being true to the primacy-of-the-state thesis.7

I am arguing that the nineteenth-century characters whom modern Indians have learnt to call revivalists were never truly anti-West or anti-Islam. They were only anti-British and anti-Muslim in the Indian context. Their ideal, in important respects, was western Christianity or West Asian Islam. And as for their concept of the state, it was perfectly modern. If anything, they were fundamentally and ferociously anti-Hindu.8 The only good Hindu to them was the Hindu who was dead, that is, the Hindu who had lived a few thousand years ago. They wanted to enter the world scene with an engineered Hindu who, but for his ideological commitment to classical Hinduism, would be a western man, a man who would accept

7It was the same statist vision of India which explains Sister Nivedita’s (1867–1911) discomfort with Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) whom she considered too conservative.
8This has been discussed in Nandy, The Intimate Enemy. See also ‘The Twilight of Certitudes’, pp. 61–82.
the rules of the game called the nation-state system and who could not
be shortchanged either by the westerner or by the Muslim.

It was this heritage on which both the mainstream liberal and the
official Marxist ideologies in India were to later build. Strange though
it may sound to many, there was a cultural continuity between the early
primacy accorded to the state and the strand of consciousness which
was later to seek legitimacy in popular modern theories of the state in
India. Both liberals and official Marxists like to trace their origins to
the earlier integrationist tradition of social reform, the one beginning
with Rammohun Roy (1772–1833) and more or less ending with
Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1940) and Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–
1915). This ignores the checks within the ideological frame of these
pioneers. Rammohun Roy, for instance, was a modernizer, but he located
the origins of the problems of Hindu personality and culture in the
colonial situation and not in Hindu traditions. He believed that the
pathologies of Hinduism he was fighting could be found only around
the institutional structures introduced by British rule and, therefore,
his own religious reforms and the new Hindu sect he established were
directed only at ‘exposed’ Hindus, not at parts of the society untouched
by colonialism. As he himself put it:

From a careful survey and observation of the people and inhabitants of various
parts of the country, and in every condition of life, I am of the opinion that the
peasants and villagers who reside at a distance from large towns and head stations
and courts of law, are as innocent, temperate and moral in their conduct as the
people of any country whatsoever; and the further I proceed towards the North
and West [away from British India], the greater the honesty, simplicity and
independence of character I meet with. 9

In his own crude, unsure way Roy did try to protect the architectonics
of Indian culture. He did not want Indian culture to be integrated into
the modern world; he wanted modernity to be integrated into Indian
culture. His modern admirers have chosen to forget the checks within
him—weak though the checks were. They have built him up as the father
of modern India and as a mindless admirer of everything western.

Thus, as far as the role of the nation-state in the Indian civilization is

9For example, Rammohun Roy, ‘Additional Queries Respecting the Condition of India’,
in Kalidas Nag and Debajoti Burman (ed.), The English Works (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo
Swaraj, 1947), Part III, pp. 63–8; see especially pp. 64–5. Cf. Gandhi’s critique of the railways
and lawyers in Hind Swaraj, in Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (Delhi: Publications
concerned, Indian modernists as well as radicals have drawn upon the ideological framework first popularized by Hindu nationalism. It was in their model that the modern nation-state first became an absolute value and acquired absolute primacy over the needs of the Indian civilization.

II

Yet, there has always been in India during the last 150 years another intellectual current that has looked differently at the needs of the society. This current sees state-oriented politics as a means of criticizing Indian culture, even as a means of renegotiating traditional social relationships, but it refuses to see such politics as the *raison d'être* of Indian civilization. However, though the majority of Indians may have always lived with such a concept of politics, for modern India the concept has survived only as part of an intellectual underground since the middle of the nineteenth century.

It was only under the influence of Gandhi that this current temporarily acquired a certain self-consciousness and political dominance. Gandhi has been often called an anarchist. To the extent that he suspected and fought state power and refused to grant it the primary role in guiding or controlling political and social change, he was close to anarchism. Also, while leading a freedom struggle against a foreign power, he could get away with his antipathy to the state. This situation could not last beyond a point. His very success dug the grave of his ideology; his antistatist political thought quickly went into recession after Independence. The demands of statecraft in a newly-independent nation were such that national leaders not only began to look with suspicion at the Gandhian emphasis on cultural traditions, they also began to encourage political interpretations of Gandhi which fitted him into the state-oriented frame of politics, neutralizing or ignoring his culture-oriented self as irrelevant saintliness or eccentricity. On this ideological issue, they were in perfect agreement with Gandhi’s assassin Nathuram Godse, an avowed statist. It was no accident that Godse, though called an ultra-conservative, felt threatened not by modernists like Jawaharlal Nehru, but by Gandhi.  

It is only now that this recessive strain of consciousness is again coming into its own in the works of a number of young and not-so-young

---

scholars—traditionalists, counter-modernists, post-Mao Marxists, anarchists and neo-Gandhians. Evidently, an open polity has its own logic. At the peripheries of the modern Indian polity itself, the demand for fuller democratic participation by people who carry the heavy ‘burden’ of their nonmodern culture is becoming an important component of the political idiom.

This consciousness has been endorsed by a political reality that has two facets: (1) an increasingly oppressive state-machine that constantly imperils the survival and ways of life of those Indians it has marginalized and (2) the growing efforts of these marginalized sections to interpret their predicament in terms alien to the modern world and to the state-centred culture of scholarship. There is enough evidence for us to believe that this strain of consciousness may begin to set the pace of public consciousness in India in the coming decades and the following section is written as a guide and a warning for those pragmatic spirits and hard-boiled modernists of both the right and the left who might have to close ranks to fight this new menace to the modern Indian nation-state.

The first element in this odd strain, the strain that views the needs of a civilization as primary, is the belief that a civilization must use the state as an instrument and not become an instrument of the state. This of course also means that the Indian state should be reformed before Indian civilization can be reformed. It does not argue out cultural reforms or even cultural revolutions. But the needs of the state do not determine such interventions. The idea that a civilization can be destroyed or changed beyond recognition reportedly for its own survival in the jungle of the nation-state system is given up here. At the same time, the culture-oriented approach believes that if there is need either for a cultural revolution or for modest cultural changes in this society, it should begin in decultured Anglo-India and then, if necessary, end in its external parts (to translate into English the concept of bahishkrit samaj used by Sunil Sahasrabudhey). Culture, in this approach, is the worldview of

---

11 The attempt to grapple with this reality has revived Gandhian social theory in India, mostly among people who reject the orthodox Gandhism of many of the direct disciples of Gandhi. The revival has as little to do with the personal life and the personal successes or failures of Gandhi as Marx’s life and his successes and failures have to do with Marx’s thought today. Modern Indians naturally like to give credit for the revival either to ‘Hindu woolly-headedness’ or to the false consciousness generated by ‘romantic propagandists’ like Richard Attenborough.

the oppressed and it must have precedence over the worldview of the dominant, even when the latter claims to represent universal, cumulative rationality and sanctions the very latest theory of oppression.

Secondly, this approach believes that a cultural tradition represents the accumulated wisdom of a people—empirical and rational in its architechttonics, though not in every detail. It does not automatically become obsolete as a consequence of the growth of modern science or technology. In fact, a complex culture has its own ethnic science and technology which are sought to be destroyed by modern science and technology with the help of state power and in the name of the obsolescence of traditional knowledge-systems and lifestyles. The non-statists believe that the traditions are under attack today because the people are under attack. As classical liberalism and czarist Marxism have both by now shown their bankruptcy, many liberals and socialists have increasingly fallen upon the use of concepts like cultural lag and false consciousness to explain away all resistance to the oppression that comes in the guise of modern science and development. The primacy-of-culture approach fears that more and more models of social engineering will be generated in the modern sector which would demand from the people greater and greater sacrifices in the name of the state and in the name of state-sponsored development and state-owned science and technology. The culture-oriented approach believes that when the lowest of the low in India are exhorted to shed their 'irrational', 'unscientific', anti-developmental traditions by the official rationalists, the exhortation is a hidden appeal to them to soften their resistance to the oppressive features of the modern political economy in India.


14On development as it looks from outside the modern world, some of the clearest statements are in Claude Alvares, 'Deadly Development', Development Forum, October 1983, 9(7); and Science, Development and Violence: Also see the Special Issue on Survival, Lokayan Bulletin, 1985, 3 (4/5); Madhya Pradesh Lokayan and Lokhit Samiti, Singrauli, Vikas ki Kimat (Ahmedabad: Setu, 1985); Arturo Escobar, Encountering Development: The Making and the Unmaking of the Third World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Vinod Raina, Aditi Chowdhury and Sumit Chowdhury (ed.), The Dispossessed: Victims of Development
Third, the culture-oriented approach assumes that culture is a dialectic between the classical and the folk, the past and the present, the dead and the living. Modern states, on the other hand, emphasize the classical and the frozen-in-time, so as to museumize culture and make it harmless. Here, too, the modernists endorse the revivalists who believe in time-travel to the past, the Orientalists to whom culture is either a distant object of study or a projection of their own cultural needs, and the deculturized to whom culture is what one sees on the stage or in the gallery. Such attitudes to culture go with a devaluation of the folk which is reduced to the artistic and musical self-expression of tribes and language groups. Ethnic arts and ethnic music then become, like ethnic food, new indicators of the social status of the rich and the powerful. Correspondingly, new areas of expertise open up in the modern sector such as ethnomuseology and ethnomusicology. And cultural anthropology then takes over the responsibility of making this truncated concept of culture communicable in the language of professional anthropology, to give the concept a bogus absolute legitimacy in the name of cultural relativism.

Culture in the present context covers, apart from 'high culture', indigenous knowledge, including indigenous theories of science, education and social change. The defence of culture, according to those who stress cultural survival, is also the defence of these native theories. The defence must challenge the basic hierarchy of cultures, the evolutionist theory of progress, and the historical awareness with which the modern mind works. This radical departure from the Enlightenent vision the modern admirers of native cultures will never accept.

Fourth, the culture-oriented approach tries to demystify the traditional reason of the state: national security. It does not deny the importance of collective security, even though the statist feel that anyone who is not a statist jeopardizes such security. However, the culture-oriented approach believes that national security can become disjunctive with people's security and may even become a threat to the latter. Some of

in Asia (Hong Kong: Arena, 1997). Also see 'Culture, Voice and Development', pp. 151–70 below; Development and Violence, pp. 171–81 below.


those who take culture seriously fear that India is fast becoming a national-security state with an ever-expanding definition of security which threatens democratic governance within the country as well as the security of India's neighbours, who are parts of Indian civilization. 17

The culture-sensitive approach to Indian politics seeks to demystify the two newer reasons of state: conventional development and mainstream science (including technology). It believes that new forces of oppression have been unleashed in Indian society in the name of these new reasons of state and the new legitimacies they have created. Those for the primacy of culture believe that these three reasons of state—security, development and modern science—are creating internal colonies, new hierarchies and recipient cultures among the people, so that a small elite can live off both economic and psychosocial surpluses extracted from the people as part of the process of modernization. 18 Modernization, the argument goes, has not fallen into wrong hands; built into it are certain forms of domination and violence. The concept of the expert or the revolutionary vanguard is part of the same story or, as it looks to the nonmoderns, part of the same conspiracy. 19

17 For instance, Bharat Wariawwallah, 'Indira's India: A National Security State?', Round Table, July 1983, pp. 274–85; and 'Personality, Domestic Political Institutions and Foreign Policy', in Ram Joshi (ed.), Congress in Indian Politics: A Centenary Perspective (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975), pp. 245–69; also Deshingkar, 'People's Security Versus National Security'.

18 For some culture-sensitive Indian intellectuals, the only valid definition of conventional development is the one given by Afsaneh Eghbal in the context of Africa in her 'L'État Contre L'éthnicité—Un Nouvelle Arme: Le Development Exclusion', IFCA Dossier, July–August 1983 (36), pp. 17–29:

Development is a structure in which a centralized power, in the form of a young sovereign state, formally negotiates international funds for rural populations representing ethnicity... no external aid, in the field of development, can relate directly to ethnic groups caught in the problematic of survival. All aid is first absorbed and often plundered by state power.

The Indian critic of development will however further generalize the principle and affirm that it holds for internal resources, too. A good summary description of the process of development in Indian from this point of view is in Alvarese, 'Deadly Development'. For a theoretically alert description of the political context within which such developmental pathologies emerge, see Rajni Kothari, The Crisis of the Moderate State and the Decline of Democracy', in Peter Lyon and James Manor (ed.) Transfer and Transformation. Political Institutions in the New Commonwealth (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), pp. 29–47.

19 A proper critique of the rhetoric of revolution has not yet emerged in India. Revolution could be considered, in certain contexts, a reason of a shadow state, the state which would come into being after the present one is captured by middle-class, urban, upper-caste revolutionaries. The sacrifices that revolutionaries demand serve, in this sense,
It is a feature of the recipient culture which is to be created through the modern state system, that the superstitions of the rich and the powerful are given less emphasis than the superstitions of the poor and lowly. This is the inescapable logic of development and scientific rationality today. Only the young, the 'immature' and the powerless are left to attack the superstitions of the powerful. (For instance, the belief popularized by the two post-World War II superpowers that national security requires the capacity to kill all living beings of the world thirty times over, as if once is not good enough; the belief of our rulers that every society will one day reach the level of prosperity of the modern West, as if the earth had that kind of resources; or the faith of our science bosses that the expansion of TV or nuclear energy would strengthen development without setting up a centralized political control system.) The so-called mature scientists, the ultra-rational liberals and professional progressives are kept busy attacking superstitions such as astrology because these are the small-scale enterprises of ill-bred, native entrepreneurs, not the trillion-dollar enterprise which the arms trade, cosmetics and pet-food industries are. It is part of the same game to emphasize the unequal economic exchanges between the East and the West and under-emphasize the unequal cultural exchanges between the two, which has already made the modern western man the ideal of the official culture of India. The culture-oriented activists believe that the latter form of unequal exchange is more dangerous because it gives legitimacy to the 'proper' dissenters wanting to lead the masses to a utopia which is but an edited version of the modern West. The first step in the creation of this new set of elites for the future is the destruction of the confidence of the people in their own systems of knowledge and ways of life, so that they become recipients both materially and non-materially.20

Fifth, faith in the primacy of culture over the state does not mean the absence of a theory of state. It connotes another kind of a theory of the state, a theory rooted in the nonmodern understanding of modernity and in a worm's-eye-view of the imperial structures and categories that go with modernity. It can also be called an outsider's theory of statist politics. (I have said earlier that this approach does give a role to the state as a protector, an internal critic and thermostat for the culture.) How-

---

ever, it is an undying superstition of our times that only the moderns can handle the complexities or negotiate the jungle of international politics, ensure internal and external security, maintain national integration and inter-communal peace. It is a part of the superstition to believe that politics is exclusively the politics organized around the state and the prerogative of the self-declared professional politicians.\(^{21}\)

The theories of the state used by outsiders—by those who take the cultural approach seriously—differ in important respects from the dominant theories of political modernization. It is the use of such alternative theories which accounts for the allegations of irrationality or false consciousness made against these outsiders. These theories look bottom up towards the modern sector of India and they are therefore not palatable to the political élite or the counter-élite dreaming of capturing the state in the future. Such nonmodern theories of the state have no commitment to the ideas of one language, one religion or one culture for India; nor do they think that such linguistic, religious or cultural unification advances the cause of the Indian people. Unlike the modernists and Hindu revivalists, those viewing Indian politics from outside the framework of the nation-state system believe it possible for a state to represent a confederation of cultures, including a multiplicity of religions and languages. To each of these cultures, other cultures are an internal opposition rather than an external enemy. Thus, for instance, true to the traditions of Hinduism, many of these outsiders believe that all Indians are definitionally Hindu, crypto-Hindus or Hinduized; it sees the modern

\(^{21}\) I must again emphasize that the culture-oriented approach to the state stands for greater democratic participation and, thus, for more politics, not less. It wants to pursue the logic of an open polity to its end, to widen the compass of democratic politics. On other hand, state-oriented politics, in societies where there are living nonmodern traditions, have often shown the tendency to throttle democratic institutions the moment participation by the underprivileged crosses a certain threshold.

I should also emphasize that non-statist politics is not the same as non-party politics. However, the two can sometimes overlap. The new interest in non-party politics is not the same which inspired some of the earlier writers on the subject such as M.N. Roy and J.P. Narain. The new interest, however, builds upon the old. For a sample of recent writings on the non-party political processes in India, see D.I. Sheth, ‘Grass-Roots Stirrings and the Future of Politics’, Alternatives, 1983, 9(1), pp. 1–24; and some of the papers in Harsh Sethi and Smita Kothari (ed.), The Non-Party Political Process: Uncertain Alternatives (Delhi: UNRISD and Lokayan, 1983), pp. 18–46, mimeo. On the issue of culture and authoritarianism in India, particularly on how authoritarianism often rears its head in such societies as part of an effort to contain the nonmodern political cultures of the peripheries, see Ashis Nandy, ‘Adorno in India: Revisiting the Psychology of Fascism’, in At the Edge of Psychology, pp. 99–111; and ‘Political Consciousness’, Seminar, 1980, (248), pp. 18–21.
meaning of the exclusivist concept 'Hindu' as a foreign imposition and as anti-Hindu. The culture-oriented do have a commitment to India as a single political entity, mainly because it helps Indian civilization to resist the suffocating embrace of the global nation-state system and the homogenizing thrust of the culture of the modern West. But they are willing to withdraw this commitment if statist forces begin to dismantle the civilization to make it a proper modern nation-state and a modern culture, that is, if India is sought to be fully de-Indianized for the sake of a powerful Indian nation-state. This does not imply any innocence about the nature of the global system. It indicates a refusal to accept the games nations play and an awareness that the problem of internal colonialism in India is part of the global structure of dominance.

Sixth, as should be obvious from the foregoing, the cultural approach draws a distinction between political participation and participation in state-oriented politics—between lokniti and rajniti, as some following Jayaprakash Narain put it—and it stresses the former. This is the kind of participation that tries to bring all sections of a society within politics without bringing all aspects of the society within the scope of the state. To those stressing such participation, the politics of the nation-state is only part of the story and democratization must have priority over system legitimacy. Alas, this also means that the non-state actors refuse to accept the need for democracy as secondary to the need for a strong state. In recent years, this approach to politics has spawned a vigorous human-rights movement in India which is trying to make democratic participation more real to the lowest of the low.22

To the statists, this other kind of political participation is a danger signal. It looks extra-systemic and non-institutionalized—the kind of participation that the well-trained political scientist, if brought up on Samuel Huntington et al., has learnt to identify as a sure indicator of political decay—a situation where political participation outstrips system legitimacy.23 No wonder, that many of those militantly allegiant to the Indian state would prefer to see the peripheries and the bottom of this society either remain apolitical or, if the latter are already in politics, systematically depoliticized.24

---

22See the PUCL Bulletin and Vigil India for an idea of the scope and concerns of various such groups, of which the better-known examples are, of course, the People's Union of Civil Liberties, People's Union of Democratic Rights, and Citizens for Democracy.

23Evidently, liberal democracy in a multi-ethnic society has built-in limits on its own commitment to democracy. See Kothari, 'Crisis of the Moderate State'.

24Such depoliticization may come through the increasing criminalization of politics
In other words, the culture-oriented approach takes the concept of open society seriously. It knows that the glib talk of culture often hides Third-World despotism. Indeed, the approach takes the principles of democratic governance to their logical conclusion by refusing to accept the definition of civic culture vended by those in control of the state. Culture, this approach affirms, lies primarily with the people. Next door in Pakistan, the army rulers pretending to be defenders of faith, would find no consolation in the new culturist point of view which is emerging in many traditional societies and, particularly, in this subcontinent. Nor could the Ayatollah of Iran in his late-life incarnation as an Islamic Dracula. Their Islam is a state-controlled set of slogans and gimmicks; it had little to do with Islamic culture, for such a culture can be identified only through open democratic processes. Hopefully, a culture-sensitive polity in India will not stop at mechanical electoral representation of atomized individuals or secularized classes; it will extend representation also to the myriad ways of life in the hope that in the twenty-first century Indian democracy will reflect something of the uniqueness of this civilization, too, and pursue the principle of 'freedom with dignity' as a basic human need.

III

Finally, I must borrow two terms from the contemporary philosophy of science to explain the link between the worldview which swears by the primacy of the state and that which swears by the primacy of culture. The former thinks it has an explanation of the latter. The statists see the emphasis on culture as a product of the frustrations of those who have been displaced from their traditional moorings by the force of modernity. More, not less, modernity is seen as the antidote for the insane, anti-scientific worldview of the disgruntled, culture-drunk, uprooted nonmoderns. This is the tired crisis-of-change thesis. The latter worldview believes that alternative paradigms of knowledge—whether they come from updated Indian traditions or from powerful post-modern theories of the state—cannot be legitimized by categories generated by the presently dominant paradigms of political analysis. There is a fundamental and irreconcilable incommensurability between the two paradigms. This is one instance, this worldview claims, where no genuine common language or dialogue is possible. However, the nonmoderns

or from the apathy brought about by the failure of the political opposition to the basic social problems. Both can be found in India today.
do believe that it is possible for parts of the modern vision to survive in another incarnation, as a subset of a post-modern, and simultaneously more rooted Indian vision—somewhat in the way the Newtonian worldview survives in the Einsteinian world. With the growing cultural self-confidence of Indian intellectuals and informed activists, it is possible that the modern West will be seen by a significant number of Indians the way Gandhi used to see it; as part of a larger native frame—valuable in many ways, but also dangerous by virtue of its ability to become cancerous.

It is known that when one attempts to explain the Newtonian worldview in Einsteinian terms, elements of it such as ‘mass’ and ‘velocity’ retard rather than facilitate communication. This is because the concepts supposedly common to the two worldviews are rooted in different theories and, thus have different meanings. (This is the well-known meaning-variation argument in post-Popperian philosophy of science.) In the context of the issues we are discussing, concepts such as rationality, empirical data, mathematization and experimental verification provide no bridge between the state-oriented and the culture-oriented worldviews. Nor do concepts like history, injustice, patriotism or dissent. No sentiment-laden lecture by the national-security chap on how much he loves his culture is going to appease the activist working among tribals to protect their lifestyle. Nor will the copious tears shed by the ultra-modern, rationalist scientist for the Indian villager move the person to whom the superstitions of the rich (such as the billion-dollar con-games involving anti-diarrhoeal drugs, so-called health-food products like Horlicks and Bournvita, or mostly unnecessary surgeries such as tonsilectomy, removal of impacted molar and Caesarean section) are more dangerous than the pathetic antics of the small-time pavement palmist, being pursued by urban rationalists for conning someone out of a few rupees (somewhat in the manner in which village lunatics are pursued by stone-throwing teenagers while greater lunatics are allowed to become national leaders or war heroes.) If you speak to culture-oriented Indians about the superstitions of the witch doctors or mantra vadis, they will shrug their shoulders and walk away. They are more concerned about the irrational search for permanent youth that helps the annual cosmetics bill of American women outstrip the combined budgets of all the African countries put together. They are more worried about the superstitious fear—of being left behind by other nations—that prompted the Indian Sixth Five-Year Plan to invest more
than Rs 9000 million in only the R&D for space and nuclear programmes when the corresponding figure in the case of education was Rs 1.2 million.25

The two sides—the statists and the culturists—speak entirely different languages. It is the unmanageable crisis of one worldview—in this case that of the nation-state-oriented modernity which has prodded some to switch sides, in some cases willingly, in others unwillingly. Call this defection another kind of political realism or call it an act of faith. I like to call it the latter; after all, faith does move mountains.

---
