



## The Abiding Binary: The Social and the Political in Modern India

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The concept of governmentality has been crucial to the study of modern Indian history. Scholars have shown how colonial governmental techniques – reform, education, medicine, enumeration, classification, codification, survey and representation – came to produce in India critical social categories such as caste, religion, gender and ethnicity (Dirks, 2001; Hodges, 2004; Kalpagam, 2014; Stoler, 1995). Scholars have also discussed the continuities and discontinuities between colonial and postcolonial governmentality in order to specify the precise nature of the modern Indian state (Legg, 2006). Partha Chatterjee has gone further and described the postcolonial social as society of the ‘governed’ (as opposed to ‘citizens’) – the governed here being not just a policy category but also a political subjectivity, demanding ethico-political (though not juridico-civic) recognition (Chatterjee, 2004; Nigam, 2008). This chapter, pleads for a rethinking of the concept of governmentality, from a perspective, not merely of colonial difference but of historical difference in a wider sense. It proposes that the concept of governmentality, produced out of Foucault’s re-reading of European history, is not applicable in the same way to all histories of the world. This is not to say that governmentality must be abandoned as a concept but only that the concept needs to be supplemented by other narratives and other concepts if it has to work transhistorically.

I shall make three basic arguments in this chapter. Firstly, I shall argue that modernity is not necessarily and not everywhere marked by a transition from sovereignty to governmentality. I am not merely referring to the fact of colonialism, which is nothing if not a routine (*contra* exceptional) mode of exercising violent sovereign power (Kolsky, 2010). I am also suggesting that sovereignty, as familiar to us from European histories of divine kingship and absolutist state, did not exist in the same form in pre-colonial India. This makes the narrative of political modernity quite different here. Secondly and consequently, I shall argue that in Indian history, the state/society or more broadly the social/political relationship is very differently configured. If governmentality is a form

of ‘rule by/of the social’ – as opposed to sovereign rule from above and outside society – then to say that Indian history exhibits a different dynamic between the social and the political is to also invite a rethinking of governmentality as a concept.<sup>1</sup> And thirdly, I argue that we need to consider ‘developmentality’ as a possible third concept aside from the sovereignty–governmentality binary to understand the operations of power in the modern world.

### The impossibility of society

The term ‘society’ came to India with British colonialism. The Sanskrit and vernacular term *samaj*, which today means society, meant quite something else in earlier times. *Samaj*, previously conceptualised as the ability to move together, connoted sociality but not society as such. *Samaj* could be a caste association, which governed the life of a *jati* (caste or other social group) through occupational, ritual and commensality norms, the writing of genealogies, and the control of marriage and adjudication of status disputes, which meant that an individual could have a Brahman *samaj*, a Kayastha *samaj*, etc. (Chatterjee, 2005). *Samaj* could also refer to a heterodox religious *sampraday* (sect) such as Vaishnava *samaj*. Or it could simply be the sociality of cultivated, urbane classes, as distinct from commoners. *Samaj* was thus always plural – a region had diverse *samajs* and an individual belonged to multiple *samajs* at the same time. The term *samaj* did not connote a bounded totality coincidental with the nation in the way we think of Indian or British society today. Nor did *samaj* denote a dichotomous location *vis-a-vis* the political in the way of the modern state/society binary.

In pre-colonial India, political power was not seen in any conceptual antinomy or transcendental relationship to social life. Kingship, like commercial guilds, religious *sampradays*, monasteries, temples, caste *samajs*, etc., was networked into a general ‘social constitution’. This social constitution could be variously imagined and contested – as *varnashrama* or the caste order, as the order of principled conduct (*dharmadeen*), as the order of *danda-niti* (justice/governance), or as a society of *grihasthyas* or householders. Within the social constitution, however imagined, different institutions exercised fair autonomy, even sovereignty. State power was thus one amongst many possible forms of power, including spiritual, intellectual, commercial and ritual power, each vying with the others for supremacy. Sovereignty, if it could be called that, was

dispersed and shared – which is why scholars of South and South-East Asia have talked of segmentary and galactic polities rather than of absolutist states (Stein, 1980; Tambiah, 1977). Even in times of seemingly centralised states, such as the Mughals, rulers maintained a certain social distance and principled indifference to the heterogeneous laws and customs of their multilingual and multireligious subjects. Instead of assuming the power to make laws *sui generis*, which is how sovereignty is defined, the Mughals thus ruled via a complex system of sharing royal power, along with subordinate kings, temples, *dargahs* and even castes (Hasan, 2004). Mark the contrast with medieval Europe, where sovereignty was by definition singular and transcendent, since it was embodied in the divine body of the king. It was sovereignty in this sense that allowed the European state to simulate a relationship of externality or alterity to the social, quite unlike pre-colonial forms of Indic kingship.

It was in this background that the colonial state appeared in India, as a form of absolute externality. This unprecedented form of rule unleashed two contradictory impulses amongst the Indian public. On the one hand, it inspired an anti-state, sometimes even an anti-politics imagination. Anxious about being politically subjected to an alien/external ruler, the colonised literati began to disavow the state and indeed politics itself (as a foreigner's game) and claim autonomy and self-rule (*swaraj*) for indigenous society. The older term *samaj* was then reinvented as the sovereign domain of national life, which flowed uninterrupted, indifferent to political upheavals on the surface of society (Gupta, 2007, 139–72). The transformation of *samaj* into *society* thus happened not through the governmentalisation of life by an absolutist state, as in the case of early-modern Europe, but through the operations of an anti-statist imagination brought on by the colonial experience, an anti-statist imagination that would often slip into an anti-politics rhetoric, enlisted ironically by even the most political man of the times, Mahatma Gandhi (Mehta, 2010b and forthcoming).

On the other hand, however, colonialism also produced what Kaviraj calls an 'enchantment of the state' in India (Kaviraj, 2005). From the nineteenth century onwards, reformers mobilised the state's externality in their struggle against entrenched orthodoxies and lobbied with colonial officials for laws against unjust social practices like bride burning and enforced widowhood. Nationalists, of course, complained that by allowing state intervention, social reformers fundamentally compromised the sovereignty of national society and consented to colonial hegemony. They argued that caste and gender were

social issues internal to the nation, whose resolution had to await national independence, whereupon the national state could legitimately reform national society by way of its having become representative of it. Yet, unsurprisingly, women, untouchables, indigenous peoples and Muslims, more explicitly from the 1920s, refused to buy into this notion of a sovereign *samaj* because it glossed over the fault-lines of caste, community and gender. They therefore banked precisely on the unmitigated sovereignty and social disconnect of the colonial state to change society through legislative and punitive action.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between state and society – the social and the political – was thus a highly charged matter in early- to mid-twentieth-century India, as was the very question ‘what is society?’. This was best articulated by philosopher, constitutionalist and Dalit leader, B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar said that the social question was the central question of modern India and that placing political freedom before social reform was nothing but casteism in the guise of nationalism (Ambedkar, 1936 [2007]). At other times, however, Ambedkar said that labelling caste a social issue, as Gandhi did, prevented it from becoming a full-fledged political cause (Ambedkar, 1938 [2013], 1946). While this might appear as a contradiction – with him at one moment prioritising the social, and at another the political – what Ambedkar actually demonstrated, with great perspicacity, was the difficulty in the Indian context of working with a pre-given social/political binary. For India was not a society in the first place, even though it might be a nation. The Indian *samaj* was a hierarchical network of caste-communities, sans mutual communication and sociability. Castes and communities exercised sovereign power (like polities unto themselves) over not only those outside or below but also over their own members, regulating social contact, sexuality and even touch, and exercising punitive violence when needed. Hinduism, Ambedkar added, was neither religion nor culture – it was law, and in that sense nothing short of a political regime (Ambedkar, 1936 [2007]). Ambedkar’s fudging of the conceptual division between the social and the political, to my mind, also explains his own ambiguous relationship with the modern state. The very same externality of the state which made it a potent instrument of intervention in society was also the state’s limit in the face of the power of caste and sexual constitutions in India. I quote Ambedkar here not to dispute that colonial governmentality, through enumeration and representation, did fundamentally transform the nature of caste and community in India. I do so, instead, to supplement the governmentality story by a longer

history of dispersed sovereignties in India, in which caste and community rule could render state rule inefficacious, especially with regard to untouchability and sexuality.

Thus, if the social–political binary emerged in India out of the experience of the colonial state’s externality *vis-a-vis* a seemingly pre-existing social; **though** the very definition of the social remained highly contested and unstable. Consequently, the categorical specificities of the social and the political remained perpetually in dispute, foxing not only the classical state–society dichotomy of normative political philosophy which Foucault himself criticised but also the ‘rule by the social’ framework of Foucault’s revisionist political history. I believe that it is this conceptual indeterminacy that resulted in a long history in modern India of alternation between mobilising the social and mobilising the political. As I shall discuss in this chapter, in India, groups at times claim efficacy through politicisation, namely by claiming to have transitioned from being a social to being a political subject. At other times groups claim efficacy through socialisation, **such as** by claiming to be a purely social subject and by refusing to be called ‘political’ in the first place. Political charge emanates from this to and fro between the twin yet contrary logics of politicisation and socialisation, rather than from the stabilisation and dominance of either category (either as ‘rule by the social’ *à la* Foucault or as the ‘political institution of society’ *à la* Claude Lefort, 1986). In the following sections, I offer a broad-stroke history of this alternation between the social and the political in India – a narrative which, amongst other things, demonstrates how governmentality can stumble before the constitutive instability in the very definition of the social.

### **Developmentality as political form**

With independence, there appeared a momentary equilibrium in the relationship between the social and the political in India, as the national democratic state, by virtue of its representation of national society, asserted its right to intervene in the social domain in order to transform it (Mehta, 2010a). Through the writing of the constitution and the enacting of new social legislation outlawing untouchability and reforming the Hindu family, the Indian state appeared to incorporate into its mandate issues of gender and caste inequality, which until then were seen as social issues that jeopardised political unity of the nation.<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, Ambedkar was instrumental in this laborious process of aligning the social and the political. But in less than a decade, Ambedkar realised the

limits of governmental power in postcolonial India, especially with regard to the sovereign domain of the Hindu family, the locus of operation of both caste and sexual hierarchy. He resigned his post as law minister and converted to Buddhism, leading Dalits en masse in a spectacular public ceremony to secede from the Hindu nation.<sup>4</sup>

I invoke Ambedkar's example as paradigmatic in order to suggest that postcolonial governmentality appeared from the very start a compromised project in the face of a recalcitrant social, which continued to function as a network of multiple nodes of caste, community, and regional sovereignties. This is not to say, however, that the postcolonial Indian state was either a failed state or a mere instrument in the hands of socially-dominant groups. In fact, there is no denying that the postcolonial regime in India did set up an elaborate governmental structure that deployed both older colonial rationalities of enumeration, classification, pacification and representation and new strategies of redistribution, planning and development. My argument is that these strategies, which appear to be native to the governmentality paradigm, actually developed into something quite different in India – namely, 'developmentality'.

Developmentality was a regime that tenuously held together two opposite imperatives, namely of representing the social, and at the same time of transforming it (this being its crucial difference to both governmentality and totalitarianism). Representation was a mode of configuring social forces as 'constituents' of the state (voters are 'constituencies', after all), of projecting through the state an image of society as a domain of rational order, in contrast to society 'out there', marked as it was by all kinds of competing sovereignties, strife and antagonism. The immediate context in which developmentality was fashioned in postcolonial India was that of militant peasant and labour movements, communist agitation, Hindu–Muslim strife, the inflow of Partition refugees, intense linguistic counter-nationalisms, and secessionist movements in regions such as Kashmir and in the north-east. The transformation of society was a very different imperative from that of representation. It was a vanguardist job, with the state's modernity and rationality pitted against the backwardness, superstitions and insurgent elements of society. What we call Nehruvian socialism – a combination of Soviet-style planning, controlled mobilisation of national capital and social reform through legislation – was just such a form of vanguardism, with the state seeking to direct the course of all social and economic activities, from education to worship to production to, eventually,

sexual reproduction, if necessary by force, in order to recast society in its own image. The continuing use of colonial institutions and laws in postcolonial years was thus hardly paradoxical. The 1894 Land Acquisition Act, for example, was widely used in postcolonial times to expropriate peasants and tribals; on the one hand, to 'integrate' them into national society, and on the other hand to facilitate the takeover of land for modernising purposes such as big dams and the capital-goods industry (years of protest led only very recently to the replacement of this act by the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, which makes consent by local communities mandatory for any change in ownership and use of land or natural resources in India).

Developmentality thus can be defined as a regime in which the state simultaneously mobilises its externality to (in the name of its modernity and rationality) and its identity with society (in the name of representation and democracy) in order to 'lead' society to the future, via a combination of governmental and exceptional powers. The epistemology that underlies developmentality is subtly different from the epistemology that underlies governmentality, though disciplines and vocabularies might appear somewhat overlapping. While governmentality mobilises a regime of 'facts' about social subjects, be they the individual addressee of discipline/care or the demographic category of the governed, the subject of developmentality is formulated as a subject of lack and not a subject of fact. Developmentality produces knowledge of not-modern, not-rational, not-secular, not-civil subjects. In other words, developmentality produces subjects as inadequate to the modernity and rationality of the very state that they inhabit and governs them accordingly. This subject of developmentality has to be adequately represented in the state and yet at the same time made adequate to that state – an inherently paradoxical project, rendering the subject schizophrenic by way of being politically advanced yet socially backward. Developmentality is thus a risky dynamic that tips over repeatedly into something else. It either becomes identical to the untrammelled political will of a state that bears down upon society in the name of a more modern future, or it devolves into a disorderly mass of multiple social subjects reclaiming and resocialising the state, at times even overcoming it, in the name of a more just present. The ceaseless play of the social and the political is precisely a function of this developmental dynamic, which exposes the contingent and troubled constitution of both state and society in our modernity.

## The return of the social

The 1976 Emergency was a landmark moment in the history of developmentality in India. Decades of insurgency which invoked the failure of postcolonial governmentality (communist-led ‘food movements’, Maoist armed struggle and a socialist-led movement against corruption and unemployment) led the government to suspend civil and democratic rights – i.e., to suspend the representational imperative in favour of the purely vanguardist – for a whole year and a half. Ironically, the state too, invoked the failure of governmentality, accusing society of having become inefficient, undisciplined and ungovernable. The Emergency, imposed by the very same Indian National Congress that had led the anti-colonial struggle and critiqued colonial emergency laws, consisted of practices such as forced sterilisation of the poor (to prevent population explosion), wide-spread slum clearance and displacement (to promote urban order), illegal detention of dissenters on a mass scale, a Twenty Point Programme for development and slogans such as ‘talk less, work more’ and ‘*garibi hatao*’ (remove poverty) (Mistry, 1995 [2008]; Tarlo, 2003; Zins, 1985). That the Emergency is better understood as a vanguardist rather than simply a totalitarian moment is proven by its intensely populist, indeed socialist, rhetoric and by the support it garnered from the Communist Party of India, itself a believer in vanguardism (Fuller and Beni, 2006; Kaviraj, 1986). Developmentality had decisively tipped over into pure political will.

The Emergency experience led to an unravelling of the developmental regime and a return of the social in 1980s and 1990s India. Let me flag three crucial symptoms of this return. First, ‘the enchantment of the state’ as a rational agent leading a backward society into enlightened modernity was over. Development had not only failed to deliver the promised future but had also unleashed great oppression in its name. The party-form, too, stood discredited, as itself a vanguardist and statist instrument. The 1980s was therefore the time of non-party or ‘social movements’ in India (Kothari, 1984; Roy and Katzenstein, 2005; Shah 2002). The most articulate, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which was against ecological destruction and the displacement of peasants and tribals by big dams, helped produce a strong anti-developmental school of thought in India (Patkar, 1999). These movements often steered clear of electoral politics, feeding into a longer story of election boycott by radical left groups, which operated out of forest and mineral-rich regions of the country where development appeared in its most crushing form. Representation, their argument seemed to be, was

never a guarantee against state oppression, because the representational logic was internal to the developmentality paradigm. In place of representation, these movements talked of autonomy and self-rule as the cornerstones of democracy. Sometimes drawing upon the Gandhian critique of the parliamentary form, sometimes the Marxist critique of liberal democracy, such discourses remain potent arguments for a socially dispersed form of self-governance in place of a governmental network, however decentralised and decentred the latter might be (Banerjee, 2015).

Secondly, these years also witnessed a rethinking of law. We know that colonial governmentality was elaborated in India as a 'rule of law', and consequently law went on to become both an anti-colonial language (many nationalist leaders were lawyers and political trials were seen as landmark events) and an instrument of social reform (Cohn, 1989; Noorani, 2005). Social legislation, however, took on a new aspect in the immediate postcolonial years, around the status of fundamental rights in the Indian Constitution – fundamental rights (to life, property, freedom of expression and of religious worship) being the normative scaffolding of social life in free India as envisioned by the 'founding fathers' of the republic. In the 1960s, disputes emerged around who could amend fundamental rights, namely the parliament or the judiciary. The Emergency was sparked off in 1975 by this dispute coming to a head. When the parliament legislated for the abolition of *zamindari* (landlordism), the courts refused to uphold this law in the name of the fundamental right to property. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi responded by abolishing the judicial review of parliamentary legislation and subordinating fundamental rights (in this case, the right to private property) to parliamentary action. What Gandhi proposed was an unqualified supremacy of the political imperative over a social constitution based on, amongst other liberal values, the right to property. The courts, in turn, responded by pointing out the dangers of unchecked political power, even by a 'representative' government, and by showing up Indira Gandhi's own election as legally invalid. Gandhi declared an emergency.

This face-off between parliamentarians and constitutionalists led to a debate around whether law was a political or a social fact. Scholars have noted how, following the Emergency, Supreme Court judgements began to routinely invoke the people rather than the technicalities of law as the ultimate touchstone of justice (Baxi, 1979). This was the moment when public interest litigation, or PIL, was established as a due process of law in India, allowing anyone to seek

justice on behalf of those too poor or too marginalised to access the courts themselves (Craig and Deshpande, 1989). The PIL became a crucial instrument of social activism in post-Emergency India, leading to creative interpretations of fundamental rights, such as reading the right to life as implying the right to universal education or the right to a clean environment (Randeria, 2003; Saran, 2014). In this history of what can be called the social life of law (as opposed to law as an instrument of social reform), while actual redressal was important, more important was the fact that law itself became a site and a language of social struggles – exemplifying an incursion of the social into what was traditionally a state domain. The feminist movement in the late 1970s and 1980s played out primarily in this newly socialised site of law and legal reform in India (Kapur and Cossman, 1996; Rajan, 2003).

Thirdly, the 1980s also saw an attempt to resocialise the state. In 1989, the Mandal Commission's recommendations were implemented, by which positions in the legislature, bureaucracy and educational institutions were sought to be reserved for lower castes – which now included not only touchables but also 'backwards' or *ex-shudras* – in proportion to their respective population strengths. This was an attempt at colouring the state the colour of society. The argument was that the state must not only represent but also literally incorporate the full spectrum of social entities in the country, such that the power struggles that marked the social domain were played out, in full public view, in the parliament, bureaucracy and universities.

Consequently, India saw a great wave of democratisation in the 1990s and 2000s – a 'silent revolution' (Jaffrelot, 2003) – as different regional, caste and linguistic formations came centre-stage and so-called non-literate and vernacular leaders became part of the political class. This effectively dislodged the erstwhile ruling classes of India, which were hitherto mainly English-educated, urban, upper caste and male. But crucially it also jeopardised the earlier image of the state as necessarily modern/secular/rational, which made plausible its vanguardist aspect. The socialisation of the state became evident in debates around the Women's Reservation Bill, which proposed a 30 per cent reservation of parliamentary seats for women. Lower caste groups argued – against older political parties such as the Congress and the communists – that there was no such category as 'women in general' operative in India. There were elite women, Backward caste women and Dalit women, and so reservations should be given to subcategories of women rather than to women as such (Menon, 2000). This was

a crucial recasting of the question of representation. If previously representation was meant to be a form of mediation between social being and political form, now the political was beginning to be seen directly as the social, the latter in a sense having trumped the former.

### **Political sociology and its limits**

The post-Emergency return of the social led to a great proliferation of identities and subjectivities in India, which not only threatened to implode any idea of a coherent national social but also forced the government to revise social categories in the 2000s. The Justice Sachar Committee of 2006, for example, fundamentally redefined what it was to be a minority in India. The report stated that Muslims suffered more from economic than from cultural exclusion, and that Muslim society was as caste-ridden as Hindu society (Rajinder, 2006). This redescription naturally disturbed the sense of absolute religious-cultural difference that had previously grounded the twentieth-century dichotomy between the Muslim minority and the Hindu majority in India. This was also a time of debate on whether caste should be re-admitted as a demographic criterion in the national census. The postcolonial state until then had worked on the premise that caste enumeration was a colonial practice that formally legitimised if not exacerbated caste divisions in society. Now strong demands were made for the naming and counting of not only the scheduled castes but of other castes, too. Concomitantly, 'backwardness' was disaggregated in terms of complex subgroupings such as 'other backward castes', 'most backward castes' and 'extremely backward castes' (Government of India, 2011; Ramaseshan, 2010). This was also the moment when hitherto dominant middle castes – such as Jats, Gujjars, Kapus and Patils – began agitating for change to 'lower' status, such as from caste to tribe, or backward caste to Dalit so as to be able to access reservations, which pushed to the limit the very principle of governmental demographics in India.

The categories of the peasant and the worker, too, had to be revised (Indian Institute of Science, 2013; National Commission, 2006a, 2006b and 2007). In the 2000s, the peasant resurfaced in India, after decades of seeming obsolescence, as a recalcitrant subject, defying both conventional Marxist class analysis and governmental categories based on occupation census. Peasants resurfaced as a debt-ridden, suicide-prone class and at the same time as a militant force

fighting corporate land acquisition and special economic zones, including in erstwhile communist-ruled regions of West Bengal (Bhaduri, 2007; Guha, 2007; Sridhar, 2006). And yet it was also clear that the peasant was no longer a purely agrarian entity, because of the crisis-ridden nature of Indian agriculture, mass out-migration to cities and the increasing centrality of non-agrarian occupations at the heart of the Indian countryside. The erstwhile category of the 'working-class', too, lost purchase. Instead, the more nebulous categories of 'informal labour' and 'urban poor' captured better the fact that the poor had fundamentally transformed the nature of the city in India, which rendered governmental Master Plans defunct. Solomon Benjamin tellingly calls this the moment of 'occupancy urbanism', in which issues of factory and work were replaced by issues of real estate, construction, property, occupation, illegal squatting, hawking, piracy and street life (Benjamin, 2008; Gandhi and Hoek, 2012).

I should note here that earlier governmental categories – such as peasant, labour, caste and tribe – were grounded in a developmentalist epistemology. It was presumed that peasants would eventually become either agrarian entrepreneurs or urban proletariat as the nation industrialised. Caste and tribal identities would, in turn, dissolve into unmarked citizenship or simply class. The unpredictable mutation of these policy categories showed up their mismatch with the more complex identities that people actually worked with on the ground, such as 'Pasmanda' (lowcaste Muslim or Dalit Christian) and 'tribe' (a term that is used in the north-east but that is supplanted by 'Adivasi' in central India). It also became evident that these identities were not going to go away with any kind of transition to modernity or capitalism. If there was any narrative at play it was that of a ceaselessly transforming conception of society. Of course, the Indian state continues to try and render these mutating subjectivities into particular target-groups for governmental management. But identities such as Dalit, Adivasi and Pasmanda are not products of governmentality. Rather, they emerged precisely in defiance of the governmental categories of scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and minority, respectively.

Clearly, what hitherto seemed stable categories of developmental sociology have imploded, giving way to unstable emergent forms and unexpected twists to democratic politics. This compelled a subtle change in governmental structure in India in the early 2000s, especially with the rise of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Indian National Congress, which took on the above process of revising governmental categories. The UPA created a split

governmental structure, which formally bifurcated the twin imperatives that constitute developmentality, namely vanguardism and representation. The elected government at this time was led by an unelectable ‘expert’ – the economist Manmohan Singh, who had previously heralded neoliberal economic policy in India – while the parliament consisted of a diversity of regional and local, middle and lower caste, religious identitarian and left politicians representing diverse social constituencies. Autonomous from the parliament and the cabinet were the National Advisory Committee (NAC) and the Knowledge Commission (KC), the latter of which was led by Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Congress, who refused to become part of the government even though she was elected by a huge majority. The NAC and KC consisted of unelected experts from the sciences and the social sciences, whose mandate was to generate progressive social policy precisely because they were unencumbered by the complications of representational politics. This was an open admission that development and representation were generically antagonistic imperatives, and could only be managed through institutional separation. In this new structure of rule, the relationship between the elected and the unelected, the expert and the mass individual, the party and the state, the social and the political, came to be greatly complicated, which reveals that the developmental paradigm had reached its limit.

### **Politics and anti-politics**

The 2011 Anti-Corruption Movement was symptomatic of this crisis in developmentality. During the Arab Spring, the Indignados and the Occupy Wall Street movements, Delhi streets, too, saw an unexpectedly massive mobilisation that soon spread to other towns of India and captured old and new media space. Three aspects of this movement are relevant to my argument. Firstly, the movement presented itself as explicitly anti-political. It spoke not only against state and bureaucracy – i.e., against institutions of rule – but also against the ‘political class’ in general. The political class – a term exceeding the familiar Marxist notion of the ruling class – was a nebulous category, including all those who had some stake or the other in formal governmental structures and, in popular perception, could even include media houses and private corporations with well-known political connections. The political class thus appeared as a new counter-category to the ‘social’.

It is significant that the political class idea did not seem to distinguish between appointed and elected individuals and at times not even between private and public actors. This greatly troubled progressive intellectuals in India, who labelled the movement as anti-political and moralistic. They raised the misplaced question of whether the people themselves could claim to be incorruptible, and whether this was not a case of an outward projection of complicity by a potentially fascistic mob onto an imaginary enemy of the people (Chatterjee, 2011). However, in popular understanding, 'political corruption' was not the same as the everyday illegality and piracy of the commoner (Sundaram, 2010) which shaded into issues of price rise and unemployment.<sup>5</sup> Corruption thus seemed to be a name for the ways in which economic and political power come together in liberal democracy and devolved into the hands of a few, despite the ruse of the institutional and disciplinary separation of the political and the economic (Nigam, 2011).

The second aspect of the movement was the greatly heterogeneous nature of the gathering, ranging from the urban poor to the middle and upper classes, and cutting across religion, gender, age and caste. Symbols and slogans, too, were confusingly mixed. Gandhian fasts, communist slogans such as 'long live the revolution', invocations of mother India usually identified with the Hindu right, national flags – all appeared side by side. In other words, the mobilisation was both ideologically and sociologically impure. Social scientists felt rather uncomfortable with this curious assembly, because the activity of the crowd could neither be predicted nor explained in terms of class, caste or ideological analysis (Nigam and Menon, 2011).

To my mind, this assembly somewhat resembled Jacques Ranciere's image of the 'accidental' ruler. Ranciere argues that democracy is not really popular sovereignty, as liberal political philosophy would have us believe, because there is never a people that preexists the moment of mobilisation. Nor is democracy a governmental form, or an apparatus of enumeration, ordering and representation. Rather, democracy is the assumption of power by an unforeseen and contingent body, whose claim to power is guaranteed by neither law nor ethics, and neither ideology nor sociological location. It is rule by a fortuitous mix of people (Ranciere, 2014). This definitely describes the anti-corruption movement, which defied sociological classifiability and ideological analysis, composed as it was by a motley crowd of women and men who claimed to be a law-making authority simply by virtue of their having appeared on the streets.<sup>6</sup>

This brings me to the third aspect – the self-presentation of the movement as ‘society-at-large’, and sometimes even as ‘civil society’. Recently, the erstwhile academic term ‘civil society’ has acquired an unprecedented public life in India, riding on the activism of lawyers, environmentalists, leftists, etc., who agitate for new laws on the right to food, education, information, a minimum number of days’ work for the poor, rehabilitation of the displaced, and so on. On the face of it, the efficacy of ‘civil society’ comes from expertise and moral authority rather than its representational nature. Often regarded as middle-class or simply elite, civil society activism has, however, shown itself to be not without risk. Recently, for example, a large number of right-to-information activists have been killed across the nation (Chauhan 2015; see also RTI Activist News, 2016). The privileged domain of civil society has thus acquired a populist resonance today. In fact, the Right to Information (RTI) agitation resulting in the RTI Act of 2005 became a source of inspiration for the anti-corruption movement, since many of those who emerged as leaders of the movement had trained themselves in civil society activism and practices of vigilance (Rosanvallon, 2008).<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, civil society insists on its purely social character and its distance from all political parties, who are all seen as corrupt irrespective of ideology. But under this rhetoric of anti-corruption lies another fact, namely that political parties in India are today mostly identified with particular social constituencies (such as the backward castes, Dalits, Hindus, Tamils and so on). The party thus literally functions in its classical sense, i.e., as a form of social partition, which reflects the radical disassembling of the social in post-1990s India. The anti-corruption movement promised, in the name of civil society and in contrast to the political class, the possibility of a new ‘society-at-large’ beyond particular social subjectivities. A contemporary cartoon in the national daily *The Indian Express* showed a young boy watching television (presumably news about the anti-corruption movement which was being broadcast hourly on national media those days) and when his father asks him what he wants to become when he grows up the boy, without turning away from the TV, says, without batting an eyelid, ‘why, civil society of course!’

This new social is signalled by the rise of a new political subject, namely the previously unheard of *aam admi*. A phrase borrowed from common conversation, *aam admi* literally means the ‘ordinary man’, a phrase rarely deployed as a political term.<sup>8</sup> The *aam admi* is neither a sociologically specifiable identity nor a class-in-the-making, nor a subject of developmentality. It is perhaps this

under-determined, contingent nature of the name that made possible diverse and disconnected groups to gather under it. The *aam admi* was thus literally invoked into being out of thin air.

But the story does not end there. As the anti-politics rhetoric of the movement peaked and political-party spokespersons scornfully challenged the anti-corruption activists to prove their mass following by contesting elections, sections from the India Against Corruption alliance decided to turn political. After ferocious internal debates and a walk-out by some social movement veterans such as Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal and some others, they decided to float a political party called the Aam Admi Party (AAP, or Party of the Common Man). This formation campaigned against both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and made a decisive intervention in the electioneering culture in 2012 and 2013. The AAP then went on to sweep the Delhi state elections with an unprecedented majority in 2014.<sup>9</sup> Such a return from anti-politics to politics, mediated by a self-consciously social moment, is precisely the logic of the alternation between the social and the political that I have been thematising in this chapter.

It is telling that the Aam Admi formation does not talk 'development'. It bears mentioning here that the term 'development' has changed its connotation since what I have called the post-Emergency dismantling of the developmentality regime. The term can mean two very different things. In neoliberal lingo, as espoused (for example) by the ultra-nationalist party in power today – the BJP, development means smart cities, expressways, malls, hotels, flexible environmental and labour laws to invite capital investment, digital connectivity, and so on. For the common voter on the ground, however, development seems to mean simply *bijli, sadak, pani* (electricity, roads and water). The BJP came to power with a massive mandate in 2014, precisely by touting its version of development. But when it went to polls in Bihar by promising the same, it was dealt a massive defeat by an alliance of low-caste parties. The latter too, spoke of development, but in the *bijli, pani, sadak* sense. This generated an explicit contrast between the Bihar model of development and the Prime Minister's Gujrat model of growth-oriented and private capital-based development (Singh, 2015). Clearly, the erstwhile statist term, 'development', is now subject to appropriation and resignification in the domain of practical politics.

The AAP, however, seems to circumvent the very term 'development'. Instead, it appears to be refiguring the relatively older *bijli, sadak, pani* sensibility

into something subtly different. In my reading this is an emergent political form, which I will provisionally call ‘infrastructural rule’. I use the term ‘infrastructure’ neither in the earlier Marxist sense of economic basics such as the capital goods industry, transport, etc., nor in the sense that media studies uses the term today for the common hardware and software network underlying the superficial diversity of media forms such as cellular phones, the internet, television and cinema. I use the term ‘infrastructure’ somewhat differently to imply a new kind of political address and structure of rule, as exemplified by the AAP’s insistence that politics must be imagined today as concerning cheap electricity and fuel, sufficient and affordable potable water, clean breathable air, accessible healthcare and education, the right of women to walk the city streets at any time, free Wi-Fi connections for everybody, and so on. That is, politics is about ensuring an infrastructure for life and living.

An infrastructural regime does three things. First, instead of regulating subjects and populations through direct address (like in governmentality) or fronting the state as a modern, vanguardist agency (as in developmentality), it promises to rule simply through the mobilisation of an enabling infrastructure. In other words, instead of pitching itself as ‘government of life’, infrastructural rule promises to facilitate life, in apparent indifference to how that life may be imagined and lived by individual subjects or groups. Mark the contrast with both developmental and ideological politics wherein the ‘content’ of life is very much at stake. In so doing, infrastructural rule produces a simulation of subjective freedom and an experience of ‘under-government’. The AAP’s promise of cleansing the government of corrupt practices and personnel, and of de-bureaucratising the administration, replacing face-to-face encounters with officials and police by web and mobile interfaces, is oriented precisely towards producing this effect of rule-at-a-distance, of civic freedom and of the government itself as not much more than background infrastructure. Further, by taking governmental policy through neighbourhood consultations (indeed, it is precisely by fronting the neighbourhood in place of identity or class that the infrastructural orientation is achieved) the AAP generates a semblance of self-rule in place of government by representatives or by experts.

Second, infrastructural rule, instead of producing a collective subject through ideology or identity, seeks to produce a collectivity around the notion of a shared everyday life. By appearing to facilitate mobility, habitation and activity – all the quotidian ways in which lives, livelihoods and sociability unfold – infrastructural

rule generates an image of everydayness which is common to all, irrespective of caste, gender, religion and class. This becomes a way of circumventing the experience of society as a disaggregated domain of particular identities and constituencies and of producing a general society-effect. In other words, this political form addresses caste, class, gender, etc. *indirectly*, via a kind of infrastructural mediation, as in the case of women's access to and safety in the streets, or the terms of employment of lower caste cleaning personnel in city municipalities and corporations. Interestingly, the party symbol of the AAP is the broomstick, which presumably stands for: (a) its clean and uncorrupt image; (b) its promise to keep the city's air, water, roads and administration clean; and (c) the 'lowest of the low' of the city's inhabitants, the ex-untouchable castes who work as cleaners, sweepers, sanitation workers and scavengers, keeping the city clean and functional in the first place.

And three, this emergent political form resignifies the very concept of infrastructure. From its original minimalist sense, of being merely the background or the substratum of a system, infrastructure becomes the main subject of political contestation. Infrastructure encompasses both the commons – in the traditional sense of what is 'naturally' given to all, namely, biodiversity, water, air, land, ideas, etc. – and the built environment, as in the case of roads, drainage, schools, hospitals and housing. Politics around infrastructure thus mobilises and renders mainstream what we earlier knew of as politics of the commons. It is telling that once the AAP assumed power in Delhi, its first step was to directly take on the capitalist agencies that, in alliance with earlier governments, sought to privatise water and energy distribution, causing great distress in the poorer localities of the city ('AAP Government', 2015; NDTV, 2014; PTI, 2015). The new government slashed power tariffs, asked for the public audit of power distribution companies, gave subsidised water to the poor, incentivised controlled energy and water consumption, exposed earlier corrupt schemes of water privatisation, imposed pollution control and worker safety mechanisms upon real-estate companies and subsequently allotted an unprecedentedly large percentage of the annual budget to education. Infrastructure thus, was indexed a dual way – as common cause, elemental to all life-worlds irrespective of class, location, sociological or cultural particularities, and as the cause of the poor, but without apparent need for either demographic categorisations or an ideology-heavy language of class conflict.

To conclude then, let me put it this way, if the history of colonial and

postcolonial India has been a history of an unstable and mutating relationship between the social and the political, in which reclaiming the social and reclaiming the political have been alternating moves, then the contemporary moment can be seen as yet another instance of a reconstituted social. The current moment has come after an unmistakable break-up of the social in 1980s–90s India and the consequent failure of erstwhile developmental categories (which is what explains the beleaguered nationalist jingoism and shrill developmental rhetoric of the Hindu right today). This narrative of alternation between the social and the political is also at the same time a narrative of change from colonial sovereignty/governmentality to postcolonial developmentality to possibly an emergent regime of infrastructural rule.

It is too early to say if infrastructural rule is necessarily going to be our contemporary political form. However, one can say this much that infrastructure as an imaginary seeks to capture, provisionally though with some adequacy, 'everyday life' as the main concern of politics. In this sense, we are at a postsociology and postideology moment, wherein demographic categories and social identities seem over-determined by a new-found salience of the 'common', in both senses of the ordinary *in* life and of shared ground *of* life. I believe we are at the threshold of a new imagination of democracy beyond the liberal paradigm, beyond the classical binary of representative versus direct democracy. Instead, we are on the verge of thinking a third notion – that of everyday democracy, in which it is the unclassifiable and slippery everyday of quotidian activity and infrastructural claims that is demanding recognition. We are of course still awaiting an adequate conceptual sense of this everyday and postsociological 'social'.

## Endnotes

- 1 I use the phrase 'rule by the social' as shorthand for the modern regime of power described by Foucault as he mapped the transition in western Europe from sovereign rule (via law, prohibition, punishment and spectacular/symbolic performance) to rule via social institutions (schools, hospitals, prisons and families – the discipline moment) and via the management of the everyday life of population groups (the biopolitics moment). Governmentality eventually evolved from being a 'police' apparatus in which social groups are addressed and administered by 'policy' into contemporary liberalism wherein society appears to govern itself (Foucault, 2009). Simon Gunn summarises how the concept of the 'social' evolves as a result (Gunn, 2006).

- 2 For the complex history of 'social reform' in India see Sarkar and Sarkar, 2008.
- 3 In 1955–56, the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Successions Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act were passed. These were Ambedkar's creations, but were passed in considerably diluted form due to immense opposition by representatives in parliament. The Indian Constitution that was adopted in 1950 formally 'abolished' untouchability and prohibited discrimination in public places. That this hardly prevented atrocities against ex-untouchables is clear from the fact that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act) had to be enacted as late as 1989 in India.
- 4 B. R. Ambedkar in his early essay 'Castes in India' (1917) argued that the Hindu family was a sovereign domain which enforced caste conformity by regulating the circulation and sexuality of women through marriage.
- 5 See also Centre for the Study, 2005, for ethnographies of everyday piracy.
- 6 The movement demanded that an anti-corruption law be passed and the institution of Jan Lokpal, or People's Ombudsman, be set up. More interestingly, the demand was that the people on the streets, with the help of some legal activists, would formulate the law themselves.
- 7 Rosanvallon talks of vigilance as a democratic mode at a time when common people mistrust rather than identify with the political class.
- 8 The *aam admi* was, however, a common character in late-1970s and early-1980s Marxist literature in Hindi, particularly the *Samanatar Kahani Andolan*, or the parallel story movement.
9. The AAP's subsequent electoral losses – especially in the Punjab – puts a further twist to the story which is still unfolding.

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