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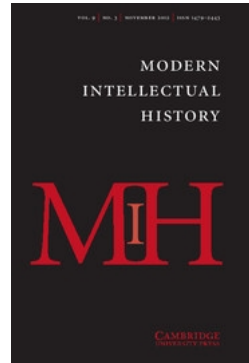
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ON GANDHI'S CRITIQUE OF THE STATE: SOURCES, CONTEXTS, CONJUNCTURES

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ON GANDHI'S CRITIQUE OF THE STATE: SOURCES, CONTEXTS, CONJUNCTURES*

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Gandhi's critique of the modern state was central to his political thinking. It served as a pivotal hinge between Gandhi's anticolonialism and his theory of politics and was given striking institutional form in his vision of decentralized peasant democracy. This essay explores the origins and implications of Gandhian antistatism by situating it within a genealogy of early twentieth-century political pluralism, specifically British and Indian pluralist criticism of state sovereignty and centralization. This essay traces that critique from the imperial sociology of Henry Sumner Maine, through the political theory of Harold Laski and G. D. H. Cole, to Radhakamal Mukerjee's reworking of these strands into a normative–universal model of Eastern pluralism. The essay concludes with a consideration of Gandhi's ideal of a stateless, nonviolent polity as a culmination and overturning of the pluralist tradition and as integral to his distinctive understanding of political freedom, rule, and action.

The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.

<div align="right">M. K. Gandhi</div>

I. VILLAGE AND STATE FROM MAINE TO GANDHI

The foundations of the Indian state represented a decisive break from the political ideals of the popular face of Indian nationalism, namely that peculiar brand of antistatist politics put forward by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. That

in its transformation from anticolonial movement to ruling ideology Indian nationalism came to dissociate itself from any deep commitment to Gandhi's political vision is a striking feature of Indian intellectual and political history. In the crucial debates of the constituent assembly, excepting some cursory concessions, the Gandhian goal of constructing a federal polity upon the self-organizing capacity of the Indian village was consciously rejected in favor of a strong, centralized (not to mention militarized) state that would be the agent of economic and social modernization.[1] While Gandhi's late pessimism about India's future was undoubtedly tied to the experience of partition and the violence it unleashed, it also partly stemmed from his sense that the Indian National Congress in its quest for independence had betrayed the implicit promise of true *swaraj* (self-rule or independence) and the transformational politics he thought his popular mobilizations had awakened. Gandhi criticized the Congress's use of nonviolent resistance (*satyagraha*) against British rule as merely instrumental and came to lament the inability of Indian nationalism to make nonviolence the foundation of a new kind of politics *tout court*. Indeed, Gandhi contended that, with independence, "the Congress in its present shape and form, i.e., as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine, [had] outlived its use". He proposed its disbandment as a political party and subsequent reconstitution as a people's service organization (*Lok Sevak Sangh*), working for the creation of a nonviolent polity; that is, for "social, moral and economic independence in terms of [India's] seven hundred thousand villages".[2]

I propose that the key to understanding this vision of a nonviolent political order lies in Gandhi's *antistatism*. Gandhi viewed the state as essentially amoral, incompatible with freedom, and founded upon violence. This critique was sustained through various calls for an alternative *panchayat raj*, understood as a nonhierarchical, decentralized polity of loosely federated village associations and powers. This understanding of peasant *swaraj* was marked by the unorthodox creativity definitive of Gandhi's life and thought, but I want to warn against viewing it as irretrievably eccentric. Gandhian antistatism had both a wider and a deeper intellectual lineage than is often supposed. In crucial respects, from the late nineteenth century to the interwar years, some form of antistatism

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[1]   Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford, 2002). For an alternative account of how Gandhi's views of peoplehood, self, and *swaraj* may have shaped India's constitutional imagination see Sarbani Sen, *The Constitution of India: Popular Sovereignty and Democratic Transformations* (Oxford, 2007); and David Gilmartin, "Rule of Law, Rule of Life: Caste, Democracy, and the Courts in India", *American Historical Review* 115/2 (April 2010), 406–27.

[2]   M. K. Gandhi, "Draft Constitution of Congress (29-1-1948)", in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (electronic book), 98 vols. (New Delhi, 1999), 98: 333. All references to this edition are cited hereafter as *CWMG*, followed by volume and page number.

(or, in a milder form, federalism) was arguably the mainstream position of anticolonial thought in India. Few Indian nationalists, from Dadabhai Naroji to Mohammed Ali Jinnah, envisioned the unitary nation state with a strong centralized bureaucracy as the necessary or ideal form of independence.[3] Moreover, the most philosophically innovative responses to the challenge of constructing a specifically *postimperial* political form were invariably attracted to forms of antistatism.[4]

In this paper I explore the contours of Indian antistatism by presenting a genealogy of its most prominent strain, one that reaches a culmination of sorts in the nationalist/*swadeshi* sociology of Radhakamal Mukerjee and, of course, in Gandhi's political thought. Its distinctive feature would involve positing the Indian village as the direct counterpoint to the modern imperial state. The associative solidarities of village and caste were thought to define the self-constituting nature of Indian society, an autonomous *social* that could be the solution to the externality and violence of the state. The self-organizing Indian village community or republic was a foundational trope of nineteenth-century colonial knowledge and garnered its most authoritative formulation in the imperial social theory of Henry Sumner Maine. It is thus no accident that Gandhi repeatedly turns to Maine's *Village-Communities in the East and West* to support his claim for the sociopolitical vitality of the Indian village. The valorization of the village in Gandhi, as well as in the work of Mukerjee, however, was neither a simple evaluative reversal of a well-worn orientalist trope nor merely a nostalgic plea for a return to a precolonial and therefore authentic India. Rather, figuring the village as the site of autonomy represented a critical reconstruction and *radicalization* of the imperial discourse on the apolitical and static nature of Indian society.

The recourse to Maine enabled a theoretical connection between the self-organizing capacity of the Indian village and the historical development of state sovereignty. Maine had used evidence from the Indian village community and its customary modes of organization to question the universality of the modern theory of state sovereignty. For Maine, the village community was definitive of a traditional social form diametrically opposed to the social, political, and economic logic of modernity. Though understood as the precursor to the modern,

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[3]   For recent work that questions the assumed trajectory from empire to nation state in anticolonial thought and practice see Fred Cooper and Jane Burbank, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2011); and Gary Wilder, "Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia", *Public Culture* 21/1(2009), 101–40.

[4]   See especially Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Enchantment of the State: Indian Thought on the Role of the State in the Narrative of Modernity", *European Journal of Sociology* 46/2 (2005), 263–96.

the village was also construed as a site of resistance to the centralizing imperatives of the modern state. In this way, the question of the village in its theoretical crystallization was intimately bound up with modes of thinking that were critical of the theory and practice of modern statehood. Further, as a threat to the vitality and autonomy of the village community, Maine had effectively equated the institutions of the modern state with the imperial state, institutions that were seen to be structured upon, and legitimated by, the logic of force. For both Mukerjee and Gandhi this was a crucial step in that it implicated anticolonial politics in the search for institutional alternatives to the modern state as well as—in the case of Gandhi especially—a radical rethinking of the relationship between law, legitimacy, and coercion.

Through such connective figures as Maine, the nationalist invocation of the Indian village participated in a global turn to antistatist thought in the early years of the twentieth century, exemplified in the pluralist political theory of Harold Laski, G. D. H. Cole and John Neville Figgis and political movements from guild socialism to syndicalism.[5] This essay begins with Maine's account of the Indian village community and its appropriation by Gandhi and Mukerjee. I then trace Maine's thought into the pluralist critique of state sovereignty and explore the ways in which Indian pluralists like Mukerjee extended and sharpened this critique by situating it in an anticolonial framework. Third, the essay compares Mukerjee's and Gandhi's turn to decentralized peasant democracy as a solution to the problem of the modern imperial state, contrasting the individualism of Gandhi's understanding of the village as a model of self-rule with Mukerjee's more corporate rendering of village and caste community. The essay concludes with a consideration of Gandhi's ideal of a stateless, nonviolent polity as the culmination and overturning of these converged lineages of pluralist political thought.

The essay charts the surprising trajectory of Maine's reception in Indian political thought, of how a conservative imperial thinker and avowed critic of popular government became an ally in the radical-nationalist reconstruction of Indian democracy. My primary aim, however, is to illuminate some underrated but critical features of Gandhi's political thought. Studies of Gandhian politics tend to focus on the theory and practice of nonviolent resistance, rarely connecting the philosophy of resistance to a theory of the state. Moreover, Gandhi's critique of the state, when analyzed, is either subsumed within his critique of modern civilization or seen as derivative of an

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[5]   Situating Mukerjee and Gandhi alongside the work of pluralists like Cole and Laski can helpfully suspend the instinct to see the former's turn to the village as simply a backward-looking enterprise. Pateman makes a similar use of Cole, namely to offset claims that participatory or "classical" democracy is incompatible with large-scale, industrial societies. See Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge, 1970).

overarching philosophical anarchism.[6] Neither view captures important elements of Gandhi's critique, especially how it served as a pivotal hinge between Gandhi's anticolonialism and his general theory of politics. Colonialism was the political problem to which the rejection of the state emerged as the correlative response. In this sense, Gandhi's critique of the modern state and his alternative vision of a decentralized, nonviolent polity were integral to the meaning and practice of *swaraj*, of what freedom from and beyond imperial rule would entail.

To demonstrate this connection, I propose a distinctive contextualization of Gandhi's antistatism, namely situating it within a wider Indian and global terrain of pluralist thought.[7] For a variety of reasons biography has served as a privileged mode for the reconstruction of Gandhi's political thinking, often resulting in a view of Gandhi's thought as *sui generis*, as an idiosyncratic mix of Victorian radicalism and Hindu philosophy. By turning to broader contexts of political argument, I analyze the sources of Gandhian concepts along a different register, in terms not only of what Gandhi read or from where he derived certain ideas, but also of what *use* he made of them. In doing so, I take these two sets of

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[6] Dhawan originated the interpretation of Gandhi as a philosophical anarchist, a view that has been reiterated many times. Here, antipathy to the modern state is seen to stem from a deep suspicion of all forms of (external) authority and rooted in Gandhi's reading of Tolstoy and Thoreau. While correct in the broad sense, in its very abstractness, this position can only signal an undifferentiated critique of all state forms and, indeed, of all institutions as such. It cannot account for the constructive side of Gandhian politics, namely the search for alternative, voluntary forms of association and authority. Ganguli and Bondurant have perceptively noted that the constructivist side may indicate a divergence from the full-blown institutional skepticism of Thoreau and Tolstoy, spurring more apposite comparisons with Kropotkin's anarchism and guild socialism. What remains absent from these more textured accounts is a conceptual linking between Gandhi's antistatism, anticolonialism, and understanding of *swaraj*. Parel and Parekh have tried to overturn this older consensus and, in their different ways, see Gandhi as more reconciled with statism—even as endorsing some progressive functions of the state. However, both admit that this tolerance appears as a grudging concession, a *via media* towards a truly nonviolent, stateless society. See Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Allahabad, 1951); Bisan Sarup Sharma, *Gandhi as a Political Thinker* (Allahabad, 1956); Biman Bihari Majumdar, ed., *Gandhian Concept of State* (Calcutta, 1957); Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Berkeley, 1965); Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Studies in Gandhism* (Ahmedabad, 1972); B. N. Ganguli, *Gandhi's Social Philosophy: Perspective and Relevance* (New York, 1973); Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination* (London, 1998); and most recently Anthony Parel, "Gandhi and the State", in Anthony Parel and Judith Brown, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge, 2011), 154–72.

[7] To my knowledge, Ganguli (*Gandhi's Social Philosophy*) is only interpreter to suggest a link between Gandhi and the broad stream of pluralist antistatism associated with Maine, Maitland, and guild socialism.

interrelated debates—concerning the nature of colonialism/imperialism and the nature of the modern state—to be crucial to understanding Gandhi's antistatism. In attending to the intellectual sources and contexts of core Gandhian ideas in this manner, I hope to work against the tendency to treat Gandhi's thought as too singular and eclectic to link to any tradition. At the same time, to situate Gandhi in *this* particular genealogy, namely in the lineage of the pluralist critique of state sovereignty, is not to claim that this is the only relevant intellectual tradition in which to cast Gandhi (or necessarily the most central in terms of Gandhi's own self-understanding). Rather, it is to reconstruct, and to locate Gandhi's critique of the state within, a highly resonant and generative context of political argument about the nature of the modern state. When set within and against this debate, one can register a sharper sense of what Gandhi's critique of the state actually entailed, what made it conceptually innovative, and how it framed Gandhi's broader political theory. Finally, in a moment when the statist projects of anticolonial nationalism seem to have collapsed or are at least held in deep suspicion, revisiting Gandhi's antistatist alternative is particularly apposite.

II. VILLAGE COMMUNITIES AND THE "SOCIAL" CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Gandhi's investments in the "erstwhile village republic of India" were deep and pervasive;[8] for no other Indian thinker was the village as central to their political imagination. Gandhi's defense of the village also varied throughout his political career, becoming more prominent and capacious over time. By the end of his life, the village stood at the conceptual core of Gandhian politics in three fundamental ways: as the institutional unit of political autonomy, the heart of a future decentralized, nonviolent polity; as a model of *swaraj*, the moral ideal of self-rule isomorphic with individual *swaraj*; and, finally, as the privileged site for constructive *satyagraha*, the exemplary mode of Gandhian political action.

For Gandhi, "India begins and ends in the villages"; village life—in its idealized as well as its current attenuated form—was taken to be representative of the *real* India. Gandhi stressed the village's longevity and self-sufficiency, characteristics seen as key to understanding India's political past and future possibilities. In a 1931 speech on the "future state of India", Gandhi offered this iconic formulation:

Princes will come and princes will go, empires will come and empires will go, but this India living in her villages will remain just as it is. Sir Henry Maine has left a monograph, *The Village Communities of India* [*sic*], in which you will find the author saying that all these villages were at one time, and are to a certain extent now, self-contained "little republics."

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8   M. K. Gandhi, "The Charkha (9-1-1940)", *CWMG*, 77: 209.

They have their own culture, mode of life, and method of protecting themselves, their own village schoolmaster, their own priest, carpenter, barber, in fact everything that a village could want . . . these villages are self-contained, and if you went there you would find that there is a kind of agreement under which they are built. From these villages has perhaps arisen what you call the iron rule of caste. Caste has been a blight on India, but it has also acted as a sort of protecting shield for these masses.[9]

This portrait of the village as an enduring, self-contained republic was a signal repetition of the colonial trope of India as a timeless and apolitical peasant society. In the nineteenth century, the self-sufficient Indian village was implicated in a model of Asiatic despotism, where the instability of elite, dynastic politics was argued to rarely disturb the settled patterns of rural life. What made these communities *apolitical* in the strict sense was their internal social constitution, which was seen as primarily structured by ties of caste and kinship. The *ahistorical* and *apolitical* village—aspects that imperial observers sometimes derided, sometimes celebrated as the source of India's stability and/or stagnation—would be redefined in Gandhi and Mukerjee as signs of a profound resilience and creative continuity. With the social forms of the village serving as a "protecting shield", imperviousness to change would now be read as resistance to the destructive political incorporation characteristic of modern state building. At stake was something more than a simple traditionalism or revivalism. Rather, the village implied a rival form of association, an alternative to the modern state.

The classic portrait of the Indian village republic had crystallized in colonial administrative literature of the early nineteenth century. The 1812 parliamentary report reviewing East India Company policy famously described the hereditary offices and duties—from the village headman to the dancing girl—associated with the corporate life of the village and asserted that "under this simple form of municipal government, the inhabitants of the country have lived, from time immemorial".[10] What enabled this millennial longevity was a kind of political distance: "The inhabitants give themselves no trouble about the breaking-up and division of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred, or to what sovereign it devolves; its internal economy remains unchanged".[11] Though Gandhi would also portray the unity and isolation of the

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9   M. K. Gandhi, "Speech at Chatham House Meeting (20-10-1931)", *CWMG*, 54: 56–7.

10   Walter Kelly Firminger, ed., *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company Dated 28th July, 1812* (Calcutta, 1917), 157–8. This extract was included in Marx's *Tribune* article on "The British Rule in India", *Karl Marx–Frederick Engels Collected Works*, vol. 12 (London, 1979), 131. For the salience and repetition of this description see Louis Dumont, "The 'Village Community' from Munro to Maine", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 9 (1966), 67–89; and Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Indiana, 2000).

11   *The Fifth Report*, 157–8.

village in similar terms, his primary reference point would be Maine's seminal *Village-Communities in East and West* (1871). In Maine's work, the self-contained village came to stand at the center of a social theory of India. Through a global comparison of Indian and Germanic village communities, Maine would treat the village community as the archetypical model of primitive/traditional society and the key to understanding the transition from ancient to modern society.[12]

Gandhi's turn to Maine's authority began early in his political career. In an 1894 petition to the Natal Assembly protesting the disenfranchisement of Indians, Gandhi credited Maine with demonstrating "that the Indian races have been familiar with representative institutions almost from time immemorial".[13] Gandhi was here contesting the purported grounds of Indian exclusion and the appeals to Maine—like the inclusion of *Village-Communities* in the famous appendix to *Hind Swaraj*—were largely animated by a felt need to reject India's assumed inferiority vis-à-vis the West.[14] There was, as yet, little by way of either a substantive account of, or any deep ideological investment in, the Indian village as such. Gandhi's invocation of the village would be transformed upon his return to India, where it at once become the primary scene of nationalist mobilization, the site of economic reconstruction, and, ultimately, the locus of a moral ideal and future alternative. We can register this shift in the changing uses of Maine. Gandhi began to couple the overturning of the image of civilizational inferiority with an emphasis on the persistence of the village republic. In Gandhi's words, Maine

had shown to India and to the world that the village life of India today was what it was five thousand years ago, which did not imply that the Indians were barbarous. On the contrary, the writer had made it clear that the Indian village life had so much vitality and character that it had persisted all these long years and weathered many a storm.[15]

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[12] In Maine, this transition was marked by the emergence of the individual (as opposed to the corporate family) as the legal unit of society, and of territory (and opposed to kinship) as the grounds of political obligation. Maine famously formulated the first shift as a movement "from Status to Contract", while the second, from kinship to locality, tracked the transition from tribal to territorial sovereignty.

[13] M. K. Gandhi, "Petition to Natal Assembly (28–6-1894)", *CWMG*, 1: 145.

[14] At this stage, Maine was often cited alongside a discordant group of eminent authorities (from Max Mueller and Frederick von Schlegel to Thomas Munro) to establish less Indian civilizational identity than parity and dignity. In *Hind Swaraj*, the village functions as part of the critique of industrialism, but is not yet understood as a full-blown moral and political ideal. On Gandhi's changing ideas of the village see especially Surinder S. Jodhka, "Nation and Village: Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 Aug. 2002, 3343–53.

[15] M. K. Gandhi, "Speech at Y.M.C.A., Calcutta (25-8-1925)", *CWMG*, 32: 332.

When implicated in reconstructive and future political possibilities, what most interested Gandhi was therefore Maine's demonstration of the vitality and longevity of the village. That India was "really a republican country" which "has survived every shock hitherto delivered" exemplified both the resiliency and creative continuity of the ancient village system.[16] And in showing India to be "a congerie of village republics", Maine provided "the skeleton of my [Gandhi's] picture to serve as a pattern for Independent India".[17]

For Maine, the persistence of the village was dependent on its internal social constitution. Maine defined the village community as "at once an organised patriarchal society and an assemblage of co-proprietors", in which "personal relationships are confounded with proprietary rights".[18] In Maine's social theory (similarly to Marx's), forms of property were intimately connected with social relations—in this case, common property was closely tied to social groups where the ideology and structure of kinship remained pervasive. Kinship underlay the logic of village customs and institutions and thereby its functional unity and "self-organising" capacity.[19] This turn to kinship was the definitive conceptual move of imperial social theory; the village community would find its place in a cumulative series of organic corporate groupings from the joint family, the endogamous caste, to the genealogical tribe—culminating in tribal sovereignty or confederation. For Maine, however, kinship did not simply reflect natural or biological ties; rather, affinity marked subjection to a common authority. Kinship was thus the principal concept of primitive political theory, an elastic legal fiction that both enabled and veiled the artificial growth of political communities.[20] Lineage groups were therefore understood to be knowingly formed as *social* and not political entities, as *self-constituted* with only indirect connection to state power.

For Maine, all ancient societies comprised organized communities of this type that despite war, conquest, and absorption would continually reconstitute themselves as *kinsmen* and "all thought, language, and law adjusted themselves to this assumption".[21] But India was unique in the survival and extensive elaboration of this primitive mode of social organization. What made caste such a "remarkable

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[16]   M. K. Gandhi, "Speech on Swadeshi at Missionary Conference, Madras (14-2-1916)", *CWMG*, 15: 160.

[17]   M. K. Gandhi, "Speech at Meeting of Deccan Princes (28-7-1946)", *CWMG*, 91: 372.

[18]   Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (London, 1861), 272.

[19]   Henry Sumner Maine, *Village-Communities in the East and West* (London, 1876), 66, 117, 125–7, 192.

[20]   For an extended discussion of Maine's theory of kinship see Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, 2010), chap. 2.

[21]   Maine, *Ancient Law*, 139.

institution" was its ability to preserve this older mode on an enlarged scale, such that all kinds of territorial, occupational, and religious associations functioned as closed endogamous groups "on the footing and on the model of the natural family".[22] "The singular complexity that is India" was thus its vast and dynamic array of intermediary corporations—self-organizing social forms from castes and sub-castes, clans and tribes to sects and brotherhoods—that mediated and mitigated the relationship between the individual and state power.[23]

Gandhi and Mukerjee would build upon this account of the organizational vitality of caste groups and village communities. For Gandhi, "the vast organisation of caste answered not only the religious wants of the community, but it answered too its political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system, and through it they dealt with any oppression from the ruling power or powers".[24] Though Gandhi and Mukerjee would ultimately understand the nature of this vitality differently, for both it signaled a distinctive form of associational autonomy that served as a safeguard against state power. Maine suggested that the secret of the long survival of India's corporate groups also lay in their symbiotic existence with a specific state form, namely ancient or Eastern empire. Ancient empires (with the exception of Rome) had been *tax-taking* empires, in which the "everyday religious or civil life of the groups to which their subjects belonged" was left untouched.[25] In contrast, *legislating* empires, such as the Roman as well as the British, through territorial consolidation and institutional centralization, tended to level social orders, evacuate intermediary associations, and undermine the authority of local, self-governing groups. For Maine, nowhere was this imposed dissolution of ancient forms of life more condensed and dramatic than in India under British rule.

What made Maine's analyses particularly compelling for later defenders of the village like Gandhi and Mukerjee was his evocative demonstration of the ways in which imperial power broke the continuity of traditional Indian social forms in unprecedented and irreversible ways. For Maine, British power in India necessarily, and for the most part unwittingly, "metamorphoses and dissolves the ideas and social forms underneath it".[26] Though the British had modeled themselves as oriental rulers, the very contact with modern systems of law,

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[22] Maine, "The Effects of Observation of India upon European Thought", in *idem*, *Village-Communities*, 219–20.

[23] See especially Alfred Comyn Lyall, *Asiatic Studies: Religious and Social*, vol. 1 (New Delhi, 1976; first published 1882), chap. 7. Lyall, a close associate and successor of Maine's, extended Maine's understanding of village communities to other genealogically ordered groups, and an analysis of caste and clan formation in India.

[24] Gandhi, "Speech on Swadeshi", 160.

[25] Maine, *Early History of Institutions*, 384.

[26] Maine, *Village-Communities*, 28.

right, and property led to the breakdown of the central institutions of the village community (e.g. customary law and collective property).[27] What was most troubling was that this imperial story was not exceptional; rather, for Maine, it exemplified the underlying logic of modern state formation itself, which everywhere went hand in hand with the "trituration in modern societies of the groups which once lived with an independent life".[28]

The modern state, through imperial expansion, was reenacting on a global scale the structural conflict between ancient and modern society, a conflict between rival forms of organized political society and opposed modes of association. The village community was exemplary of ancient corporate kinship society "where rules of life are derived from customs of village or city". In contrast to the reign of customary law, in "highly-centralised, actively-legislating, States", laws emanate from an external source (the sovereign) and obedience to them is bound to the state's coercive power.[29] Modern sovereignty both in its reliance on a command theory of law and in its historical association with the suppression of self-regulating social orders was, for Maine, thoroughly imbricated in the logic of force.[30] By intimating a tight historical and theoretical link between force and state sovereignty, Maine initiated a conceptual framework and pattern of criticism that would be subsequently elaborated by early twentieth-century pluralists. For Gandhi and Mukerjee, the equation of the modern state and the imperial state would crucially frame and pointedly inflect anticolonial politics in an antistatist direction. For both Indian and British pluralists, the problem of force seemingly inhered in the modern state's structures of legitimation and thus set the stage for a radical questioning of the basic premises of the theory of state sovereignty.

III. PLURALISM IN THE EAST AND WEST: THE CRITIQUE OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY

Early twentieth-century pluralism, both Indian and British, sought to undo the nexus of force, legislation, and state sovereignty to which Maine had pointed. British pluralists, such as Laski, Cole, and Figgis, would systematically reject a host of key attributes of state sovereignty—from institutions of territorial representation to the philosophical underpinnings of contractual theories of freedom, consent, and obligation. Most crucially, pluralists redirected what was in essence a conservative critique of sovereignty in avowedly radical and democratic

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[27]   For a detailed analysis of Maine's account of the impact of British rule see Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, chap. 5.

[28]   Maine, *Early History of Institutions*, 387.

[29]   Ibid., 390.

[30]   Ibid., 396.

directions. Maine's late conservatism, especially, stemmed from an anxiety about the implications of modern sovereignty in an age of popular government. An unmediated, popular sovereignty was thought to exacerbate tendencies towards leveling and uniformity, inevitably ending in despotism.[31] Maine argued for invigorating checks and balances, a response akin to a number of nineteenth-century liberal attempts at stabilizing mass democracy. For pluralists, however, the rejection of sovereignty was seen to enable truer forms of democratic self-governance.[32] The pluralist critique of sovereignty would be coupled with the elaboration of a distinct institutional alternative, a decentralized federal polity based on the devolution of authority to local and functional groups.

British pluralists argued that older models of unitary sovereignty were no longer viable in age of unprecedented state expansion and centralization. From increasing government regulation of industry to the introduction of compulsory conscription, the state made ever-greater claims on the material and moral lives of its citizens. Laski coined the term *pluralism* to describe this critical approach to the classical theory of the state. Building on the pragmatist opposition between monist and pluralist epistemology, Laski saw an analogous presumption towards absolutism in the "monistic theory of the state" of early modern sovereignty theorists.[33] While the appeal of absolute sovereign authority may have made sense in the aftermath of the religious wars of the seventeenth century, for Laski, advocating unlimited sovereignty in an age of advancing state power was positively dangerous. To do so seemed only to enhance the state's right to impose its unitary will and moral purpose, leaving little space for citizens' independent judgment and thus genuine, active consent (as opposed to either the formal consent ascribed to representative-democratic legitimation or a Hobbesian consent compelled through the threat of force).[34]

Pluralists instead saw in a whole host of voluntary associations—from churches to trade unions—embryonic forms of self-governing and noncoercive organization upon which to devolve sovereignty. In its more socialist turns,

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[31]   Henry Sumner Maine, *Popular Government* (Indianapolis, 1976).

[32]   For most pluralists—and especially for Mukerjee and Gandhi—statism was associated with majoritarianism, mass democracy, and/or elite-driven and constrictive systems of territorial representation. In turning to models of local organization and functional representation, pluralists were working with a concept of democracy defined more by ideals of direct participation and self-rule rather than by majority-rule and popular sovereignty. See Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 22–44.

[33]   Harold J. Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (New Haven, 1917), 3, 11–21. In addition to Hobbes and Bodin, Laski and other pluralists were also reacting against the nineteenth-century revival of sovereignty theory by John Austin and the idealist theory of the state offered by contemporaries Bernard Bosanquet and T. H. Green.

[34]   Harold J. Laski, *Authority in the Modern State* (New Haven, 1919), 31–58.

where trade unions and workplace associations were exemplars of the kinds of group in need of protection and vitalization, decentralization was deemed more appropriate to the social, economic, and political demands of mass industrial democracy.[35] To establish the possibility of a federal alternative, pluralists attempted to refute the philosophical bases of the doctrine of unitary sovereignty. The most common strategy was to contest the idea of the state as a unique kind of collectivity, upon which the claims to supervening authority and obligation were seen to ultimately depend. This was to question the very core of the theoretical project of the social-contract tradition (from Hobbes to Rousseau) that sought precisely to demonstrate how the process of sovereign authorization of the original contract endowed the state with a singularly self-generated authority, character, and personality. In the view of strict sovereigntists, nominally self-governing associations such as churches, joint-stock companies, universities, trade unions, housing cooperatives, and so on were by definition *secondary* and derivative of state recognition. Figgis, Laski, and Cole would all challenge this claim by insisting that the state, while certainly larger and more formidable, was not *qualitatively* different from the plethora of voluntary associations that organized society.[36]

This conceptual shift would have important implications for a theory of obligation; indeed, for Laski and Cole, it enabled a radical interrogation of the nature and limits of political obedience. For Laski, it was "a matter of degree and not of kind that the State should find for its decrees more usual acceptance than those of any other association".[37] The right to omnipotence and total allegiance by the state was a *projected claim* and not an empirical fact.[38] Ultimately, consent to the state's objectives was mediated by every citizen's judgment about the

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[35] For discussions of pluralist theory and institutional practice see Jay Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912–1918* (London, 1974); Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1906–1926* (Oxford, 2002); and Paul Q. Hirst, *The Pluralist Theory of the State: Selected Writings of G. D. H. Cole, J. N. Figgis, and H. J. Laski* (London, 1989). Other recent work on pluralists includes Cécile Laborde, *Pluralist Thought and the State in Britain and France, 1900–25* (New York, 2000); James Meadowcraft, *Conceptualizing the State: Innovation and Dispute in British Political Thought 1880–1914* (Oxford, 1995); David Nicholls, *The Pluralist State: The Political Ideas of J. N. Figgis and His Contemporaries* (London, 1975); and David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge, 1997).

[36] Figgis was foremost in contesting the legal basis of the "concessionary theory" of group personality, for which he relied on the historical jurisprudence of Gierke and Maitland. John Neville Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State* (London, 1914). For a discussion of the pluralist theory of corporations, see Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*.

[37] Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty*, 17.

[38] Ibid., 18.

reasonableness of the claim imposed and thus in principle was the same kind of obligation that groups like churches and trade unions might ask of their members. Cole was even more provocative in refuting the distinct character of state obligation. Not only was the state's claim to the entirety of a citizen's allegiance empirically false, Cole further argued that the state lacked any inherent *right* to impose such expansive obligations.[39] If, as Cole insisted, all associations were equally voluntary and contractual, then the state's obligations can have no special moral claim over and above all others. Cole took this critique to its logical conclusion in two ways. First, in the case of conscription, Cole defended the right to resist military service on the grounds that in those areas of state practice least subject to democratic decision making (e.g. foreign policy), the state had a diminished moral capacity to demand obedience.[40] Second, Cole recognized quite clearly that to pluralize sovereignty internally was to call into question its external solidity. A pluralist world order would imply the transnational layering of sovereign institutions, where citizens' legitimate interests and obligations would place them in communities that traversed the moral and political boundaries of any individual nation state.

The pluralist challenge to the doctrine of state sovereignty put in stark form a variety of mounting criticisms—from romanticism, medievalism, socialism, to liberalism—against the social-contract tradition over the course of the nineteenth century. But pluralism was in many ways theoretically more robust, for it did not rest at offering mechanisms to mitigate, check, and balance state power but rather called for its radical restructuring. The pluralist critique of the state also took on strikingly global resonances. In France, a comparable movement appeared in the legal sociology of Léon Duguit and the revolutionary syndicalism of Georges Sorel and Edouard Berth.[41] Laski here was the truly global figure in extending the pluralist debate on the state. Laski translated and introduced Duguit to the English-speaking world and brought English pluralism into dialogue with American progressives.[42] Laski's connections to India were also extensive and multilayered. Though Laski's name would eventually become closely associated

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[39]   G. D. H. Cole, "Conflicting Social Obligations", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 15 (1914–15), 140–59.

[40]   G. D. H. Cole, "The Nature of the State in Its External Relations", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 16 (1915–1916), 310–25. See Jeanne Morefield's illuminating discussion of Cole's view of sovereignty in "Democratic Commonwealth or Historic Fiction: Early Twentieth Century Imperialist and Pluralist Narratives of State Responsibility", presentation at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston (2008).

[41]   See Laborde, *Pluralist Thought and the State in Britain and France, 1900–25.*

[42]   For the mutual interactions between English pluralists and American progressives see Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State.*

with Nehruvian statism and the Indian state's experiments in central planning, there was an earlier Indian engagement with Laski's pluralism. At the London School of Economics, Laski spurred a number of Indian students towards analyzing and advocating pluralism in a variety of ways, the most significant of which fed into an emergent pluralist historiography of ancient India.[43]

Two other forces made the pluralist critique ripe for innovative development in India. First, Indian thinkers read Laski and other pluralists via a theoretical framework that was already deeply marked by the thought of Maine. Though Maine's legacy was important for Maitland and Laski,[44] his contributions to British pluralism were more often indirect. They were part of the general stream of thinking associated with medieval corporatism, and, in this context, were quickly overshadowed by the work of Gierke.[45] For Indian pluralism, however, Maine remained essential, for it was in his work that the Indian village community was made the Eastern equivalent of the medieval corporate group. Second, Indian pluralism was importantly tied to the intellectual and political ferment around the 1905 partition of Bengal, which had produced a wholesale rethinking of India's past and future linked to the concept of *swadeshi*.[46] Sparked by his activism in the context of *swadeshi* politics, Mukerjee's first major work, *The Foundations of*

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[43] Notable examples include Sudhir Chandra Ray's "The idea of Liberty in Relation to State and Non-state Organization in England" (PhD thesis, London School of Economics 1922); Brij Mohan Sharma's "The Problem of Indian Federalism" (PhD thesis, Lucknow University 1931); Beni Prasad's *Theory of Government in Ancient India (post-Vedic)* (Allahabad, 1927); Har Narain Sinha, *Sovereignty in Ancient Indian Polity: A Study in the Evolution of Early Indian State* (London, 1938). On the pluralist historiography of ancient India inspired by Laski, see especially Inden, *Imagining India*, 194–6.

[44] Laski was particularly interested in Maine's account of obedience (a point we will return to in the final section). Notably, Laski keenly collected Maine's disparate papers and eventually had them archived at the LSE.

[45] Maine and Gierke shared many theoretical imperatives, most notably their critique of natural-law theory and the dominance of Roman law, both of which were seen to underpin an absolutist conception of state sovereignty. On the importance of Gierke for pluralism see Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*.

[46] Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh are just two of most well known intellectuals of the *swadeshi* movement. See the classic work by Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement of Bengal 1903–1908* (New Delhi, 1973). Manu Goswami also situates Mukerjee in relation to *swadeshi*/nationalist political economy in *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago, 2004); and *idem*, "Autonomy and Comparability: Notes on the Anticolonial and the Postcolonial", *boundary 2* 322/2 (2005), 201–25. See also C. A. Bayly's discussion of Mukerjee in "Empires and Indian Liberals", in Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland, eds., *Race, Nation and Empire: Making Histories 1750 to the Present* (Manchester, 2010), 74–95. For the background and influence of Mukerjee's work more generally, see the essays (including Mukerjee's own autobiographical essay) in Baljit Singh, ed., *The Frontiers of Social Science: In honour of Radhakamal Mukerjee* (Allahabad, 1956);

Indian Economics (1916), proposed a radical reorientation for Indian economics centered upon the Indian village and its cottage industries. In the companion work considered here, *Democracies of the East: A Study in Comparative Politics* (1923), the revitalized village would be seen as a solution not only to the distortions of a colonial economy but also to the central problems of modern politics. Mukerjee built upon the new pluralist historiography of ancient Hindu institutions, in which caste guilds and village organizations were singled out as the basic units of the traditional Indian polity.[47] Mukerjee's comparative method would tie this historical work to contemporary examples from South Asia—but also Arabia, China, Japan, and Russia—to produce a normative–universal model of Eastern pluralism. The *swadeshi* movement, in its experimentation in reviving indigenous institutions, practices, and knowledges, also had made a deep imprint on Gandhian thought and politics. Gandhi took Mukerjee to be a fellow traveler, especially in the work on village cooperatives, and would likewise situate the sociopolitical revival of the village at the core of a postimperial polity. We can see these overlapping vectors in S.N. Agarwal's *Gandhian Constitution for Free India* (1946), in which Agarwal draws heavily upon Mukerjee, as well as the pluralist reworking of ancient institutions, to defend a future Gandhian polity.[48]

In *Democracies of the East*, Mukerjee directly engaged key themes of British pluralist critiques of sovereignty, but refashioned them in terms of an anticolonial framework. For Mukerjee, the pluralist critique made possible new opportunities to redirect the global trajectory of the state. Major strands of Western political thought were now recognizing the importance of forms of intermediary allegiance and association between the individual and the state. In the West, these challenges came most often on behalf of the laboring classes, but also marked a wider dissatisfaction with the hyper-individualism of the liberal state. Worries about the mechanization and atomization of social life brought about by the industrial state were leading to a new recognition of the social nature of man, that man might function best and be most free in small communities. Syndicalism and guild socialism were practical examples of such calls for the reinvigoration of functional and local associations. In addition to these internal critiques of sovereignty, for Mukerjee, the experience of global war, and the new international consciousness

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and P. C. Joshi, "Lucknow School of Economics and Sociology and Its Relevance Today: Some Reflections", *Sociological Bulletin* 35/1(1986), 1–27.

[47] The most important works of this historiography were R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1918); Radhakumud Mookerji, *Local Government in Ancient India* (Oxford, 1920); and Prasad, *Theory of Government of Ancient India*. Notably, Radhakumud Mookerji was Radhakamal Mukerjee's elder brother.

[48] Shriman Narayan Agarwal, *Gandhian Constitution for Free India* (Allahabad, 1946). Agarwal also published a companion work, *Gandhian Plan for Economic Development of India* (Bombay, 1944). Both works included forewords by Gandhi.

around the League of Nations, had worked to expose "the moral limitations of a purely national territorial State".[49] The state was losing its claim to preeminence as sovereignty itself was becoming composite and multiple. In this context, the anticolonial demand made a further claim in favor of regionalism, which, for Mukerjee, could be understood as a call for deep pluralization to counter the imposed rigidity and uniformity of the modern imperial state.

For Mukerjee, Western pluralist criticism required both expansion and correction. The historical triumph of the monistic state in the West had distorted its political imagination, leaving the West bankrupt in conceptualizing genuinely alternative forms of political association. Mukerjee argued that the West was held captive to conceptual limits imposed by the particularity of its destructive historical experience. In substantiating this claim, Mukerjee would extend Maine's equation of the modern and imperial state in some remarkable ways. With Maine, Mukerjee saw the imperial state as the outward extension of the monistic, Roman–Gothic state, which sought to impose a unitary legal–political order and undermined the vitality of local associational life below. Mukerjee would use this insight, in a reversal of colonial sociology, to retell the history of Western state formation as a fundamentally distorted one when viewed through the mirror of Eastern pluralism.

For Mukerjee, war and conquest were the central features of Western political development, making the state in the West "too much the descendent of the invader and conqueror".[50] When the state "originates in force, the form of government is so instituted that it can best represent and symbolize that force".[51] Not only were intermediate jurisdictions "effaced" but "the heavy hand of State absolutism" marked the very structure of law and administration; they bore the imprint of a mode of assimilating subjects as if they were conquered peoples. While the prevalence of war might have made absolutism a historical necessity, it also, according to Mukerjee, "delayed and perhaps arrested" the development in the West of peaceable group cooperation and coordination.[52] Absolutism had institutionalized competition between the state and local groups that had to wrest privileges from an uncooperative state. This structure of antagonism could have positive outcomes; for instance, it institutionalized checks on state power through the establishment of systems of political representation and delegation (a development thought to be unknown in the East). Nevertheless, the long-term legacy of antagonism was

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[49]   Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East: A Study in Comparative Politics* (London, 1923), v–vi.
[50]   Ibid., 107.
[51]   Ibid., 12.
[52]   Ibid., 7.

extreme politicization and political stratification—Mukerjee here had in mind feudalism—as well as escalating interest-based competition. This was why Mukerjee questioned Western pluralism's prioritization of industrial groups in its attempt to invigorate associational life. To prioritize economic classes threatened to sanctify interest-based group competition and risked splintering the totality of social life. Mukerjee worried that the mere transfer of rights to groups would do little to truly harmonize group and individual interest, a harmonization better secured through Eastern models of solidarity, reciprocity, and service than through the logic of competing interests.

Mukerjee's suggestion was to look East for a more genuine and uninterrupted history of pluralist politics. Indeed, India (and Asia more broadly) was argued to have had "an old and established tradition in political pluralism" and thus a great advantage over the West in realizing decentralized democracy.[53] Revitalizing traditional self-governing local and social units—"communalism" of the East—would thus enable India (and through India, the world) to overcome the "discredited" Western imperial state and its mechanical, appropriative, and absolutist politics. In its structure and conclusion, it was an exemplary moment of anticolonial criticism, which mobilized the past and future trajectory of the (postimperial) pluralist state to question the presumptive universality of Western political development.

IV. TOWARDS A POSTIMPERIAL POLITY: DECENTRALIZATION AND PEASANT *SWARAJ*

In *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (1909), Gandhi famously ridiculed the nationalist understanding of independence as simply a demand for "English rule without the Englishman".[54] In setting its sights on taking over the state, anticolonial nationalism seemed only interested in a change of personnel. Though, for Gandhi, formal independence from the British was not insignificant—he thought it would end specifically colonial forms of exploitation and check egregious abuses of power—it could not be equated with *swaraj.* Capturing the state amounted to retaining "the tiger's nature but not the tiger",[55] and therefore would do nothing to undo the modern state's tendencies towards militarism, expansion, and domination—in other words, imperialism. *Swaraj* therefore could not be equated with the assumption of state power, indeed it demanded a sharp rejection of the state in its modern imperial form. For Gandhi, this was to take the *anticolonial* politics of Indian nationalism seriously,

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53   Ibid., x.
54   M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj, CWMG*, 10: 255.
55   Ibid., 255.

for true *swaraj* had to challenge the forces that made possible and emboldened imperialism. With Maine and Mukerjee, Gandhi understood the modern state to be deeply implicated in the history of imperialism and thus the search for an institutional alternative was central to his anticolonial politics. Mukerjee and Gandhi would both advocate decentralized peasant democracy as the solution to the discredited modern state; the revitalizing village would be the nucleus of a future postimperial polity.

Gandhi and Mukerjee would propose nearly identical schemas for the devolution of political power to the village, leading upwards, in turn, to an all-India coordination body or federation. The political primacy of the village would be secured, controversially, through the insistence that the village be the only site of direct elections. At the same time, these constitutional configurations were underpinned by subtly divergent understandings of the village as an association and moral–political ideal. While both Mukerjee and Gandhi, in their critical appropriation of imperial social theory, were keen to read the persistence of the village system as a sign of experimentation, strength, and continuity—in Agarwal's words, as "an ancient laboratory for constitutional development"[56]— they also understood the source and implication of that vitality differently. Mukerjee emphasized the dynamism of village and caste as self-constituting intermediary associations and recommended a corporate pluralism. Mukerjee's decentralized polity thus took the form of a loose federation, organized around a myriad of semiautonomous associations from the village assembly to the caste guild. Gandhi, by contrast, underscored the autonomy of the village as defined by and maintained through self-sufficiency, simplicity, and, even, isolation. Less invested in its corporate capacity, for Gandhi the village was most crucial as an exemplary site for enacting and experiencing *swaraj*, understood as a moral–political ideal of disciplined self-rule as well as a distinct mode of rule that was to be nonviolent and nonhierarchical.

In Mukerjee's model of Eastern pluralism we see the deep imprint of Maine's work, in terms both of the social theory which underpinned it and of the methods of comparative politics used to unearth it. Maine inaugurated a model of comparison that was structured upon wide-ranging, global comparisons that were, in turn, utilized to augment the historical record and reconstruct evolutionary lines of development.[57] For Mukerjee, likewise, comparative politics rightly understood would lend world-historical significance to Eastern political experience. It was in the East that pluralist polities had been naturally evolving

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[56]   Agarwal, *Gandhian Constitution*, 10.
[57]   For the importance of the comparative method in nineteenth-century thought, and Maine's role in its elaboration, see John Burrow, Stefan Collini, and Donald Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics* (Cambridge, 1983).

for centuries and, Mukerjee contended, could now, in the churning towards independence, be made the basis of new and higher forms of federal democracy. This was the greatest and most neglected discovery of comparative politics. Unlike the West, where experiments in decentralization had to be built upon "the debris" of the past—institutions such as the medieval guild that had been thoroughly evacuated by the modern state—in the East the state had never been the only compulsory or universal form of association. Functional and territorial associations such as village assemblies and caste guilds had historically resisted state incursion and, in their natural evolution, tended toward autonomy. They were, for Mukerjee, self-organizing institutions of exactly the kind upon which pluralistic models of sovereignty ought to be founded.

Mukerjee argued that Western political science, in deeming European history its normative model of political evolution, severely misunderstood the nature and implication of Eastern political formations. Not only was it wrongly assumed that "every race, every people, has traversed in the past or must traverse in the future . . . the same monotonous road", but any phenomenon that did not conform to this evolutionary model was deemed rudimentary; they could be incorporated as historical laggards but were not seen as "capable of the highest development along their own lines".[58] Imperial thinkers like Lyall and Maine had noted the dynamism of India's corporate groups; caste and lineage groups were rightly understood to be in a perpetual state of formation—of absorption, dissolution, and reconstitution.[59] Yet these groups were thought to have never "fused" into great territorial nationalities in the manner of the Western tribes of postclassical Europe. Indeed, Maine and Lyall rendered this inability to amalgamate into overtly political forms of sovereignty a case of "arrested development".[60]

In criticizing imperial sociology, Mukerjee would insist that caste and village communities were not merely "interesting specimens in a museum of social archaeology",[61] but composite organizations that blended natural and artificial interests and were capable of aggregating into extensive federations. For Mukerjee, even Maine misrecognized the synthesis and reintegration of village communities as a mere repetition of archaic tribal types rather than as instantiating novel forms of complex coordination.[62] Though caste was, for Mukerjee, the "very

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[58]   Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 46.

[59]   Lyall, *Asiatic Studies: Religious and Social*, vol. 1, 150–79.

[60]   Ibid., viii. See also Roger Owen, "Anthropology and Imperial Administration: Sir Alfred Lyall and the Official Uses of Theories of Social Change Developed in India after 1857", in T. Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London, 1975), 223–43.

[61]   Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 85.

[62]   Agarwal, following Mukerjee, also read the village republic to be "a product of mature thought and serious experimentation" as opposed to "a relic and survival of tribal communism". Agarwal, *Gandhian Constitution*, 12.

backbone of the body politic",[63] it was not the only thread of social cohesion or group orientation, and one that was not so exclusive as to override all other axes of cooperation and solidarity. In rendering caste and village as expansive models of association, Mukerjee also sought to overturn the trope of village isolation. Though the self-organizing village was undoubtedly the "principle social organism of India",[64] it did not exist in a vacuum with only a distant imperial center to contend with. Rather it formed an essential core of a vast intersecting web of federations, making possible the greater organic and functional solidarity of Eastern societies.

For Mukerjee, the true potential of Eastern forms, however, had been stymied, distorted, and arrested by the coming of the imperial state. The imposition of unitary legal orders—as well as a deep English bias towards individualism—had undermined the traditional form and function of caste and village groups, making them more rigidly exclusive and parochial.[65] So, too, the higher development of pluralist polities into great political federations or leagues had been checked by outside intervention.[66] This was indeed why decolonization provided such an extraordinary opportunity for experimentation with traditional social forms that could enable the higher evolution of democracy in Asia.

Mukerjee hoped the East could learn from the misdirections of Western history to establish new political forms that "need not pass through the stage of middle-class supremacy . . . and pay its penalties".[67] Just as Mukerjee's economic work sought to establish forms of cooperative industry that did not have to suffer the path of capitalist exploitation, the postimperial pluralist state could likewise institute new forms of communal democracy without undergoing the brutalities of bourgeois politics—its class antagonisms and its blood-soaked revolutions. The program of decentralization would transform the very character of representation, delegating in the direction of local associations and enhancing reciprocal responsibility. By revitalizing direct democracy from below, Indian pluralism could displace imported models of state and representation, and offer "the silent and time-honoured democracy of the village council and functional assembly" as "a distinctively Eastern contribution to the political history of man".[68]

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[63] Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 8, 280–81.

[64] Ibid., 165, 210.

[65] Ibid., 102. In this view, Mukerjee relied upon Maine's account of the transformation of Indian law and custom under British rule.

[66] Ibid., 11, 131.

[67] Ibid., 358.

[68] Ibid., xxv.

In 1917, shortly after his return to India from South Africa, Gandhi presided over a lecture of Mukerjee's on agriculture and industry delivered at St Stephen's College, Delhi. He praised Mukerjee's call for distinctively Indian models of development, ones that recognized, in Gandhi's words, that "the principles of Western economics could not be applied to Indian conditions in the same way as the rules of grammar and syntax of one language would not be applicable to another language".[69] What Mukerjee further demonstrated, according to Gandhi, was that theoretical economics ought to emerge out of extended contact with "Indian conditions", conditions defined by the historical centrality and contemporary decline of the Indian village. In his enthusiasm for Mukerjee we can mark a crucial shift in Gandhi's own political thinking and practice, one that increasingly converged on the revitalization of the village as the key to true independence—what Gandhi termed *swaraj*.

In its institutional form, Gandhi associated *swaraj* with an extensive program of economic and political decentralization. "Independence must begin at the bottom";[70] it could not be "imposed from above . . . [o]therwise it would be a question of change of masters only". For *swaraj* to be "self-rule in terms of the masses",[71] every village must become "a republic or *panchayat* [village council] having full powers", forming a "structure composed of innumerable villages" in "ever-widening, never-ascending circles".[72] The village, for Gandhi, would be "a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants",[73] governed by a *panchayat* possessing combined legislative, judicial, and executive powers and as "economically and politically autonomous as possible".[74] As noted earlier, the village was to be vested with primary political authority; it was to be the only body directly elected by the people based upon universal adult suffrage.[75] District, provincial, and all-India *panchayats* would either be indirectly elected by the local *panchayats* or their leaders would serve on these higher advisory bodies. Of course, for Gandhi, it was crucial that these nonlocal *panchayats* not be conceived of as more powerful, for the "superstructure of Independence is not to be built on the village unit so that the tops weighs down on and crushes forty crores of people who constitute the base". Rather, India will be "a congerie

[69]   Quoted in Baljit Singh, "Mukerjee as a Pioneer in Indian Economics", in *idem*, ed., *The Frontiers of Social Science*, 436.

[70]   M. K. Gandhi, "Independence (21-7-1946)", *CWMG*, 91: 325–6

[71]   Gandhi, "Speech at Meeting of Deccan Princes", 371.

[72]   Gandhi, "Independence", 325–6.

[73]   M. K. Gandhi, "Question Box (18-7-42)", *CWMG*, 83: 113.

[74]   Gandhi, "Speech at Meeting of Deccan Princes", 371.

[75]   Gandhi suggested two qualifications on universal adult suffrage: a bread-labor rule (labor as a requirement for voting) and a limited age range from 18 to 50. See Bose, *Studies in Gandhism*, chap. 3.

of village republics" with "the village as the center of a series of ever-widening circles, not one on top of the other, but all on the same plane, so that none is higher or lower than the other".[76]

Like Mukerjee, Gandhi often contrasted the true democracy of peasant *swaraj* to modern representative democracy and the pathologies it entailed. In *Hind Swaraj*, he famously complained of the ineffectiveness and capriciousness of the British Parliament, declaring "the Mother of Parliaments" to be "a sterile women and a prostitute".[77] For Gandhi, modern politics seemed to institutionalize the most instrumental aspects of politics, embodying little more than an elite struggle for power and a vehicle for professional advancement. The party system infused politics with the logic of competition and resentment rather than an inclination towards moderation, reciprocity, and right judgment. In this context, legislation was often simply the contingent outcome of the power of one party or coalition and thus a coercive imposition, a tendency only exacerbated by the logic of majoritarianism. Mukerjee and Gandhi were especially anxious about the adverse consequences of centralized structures of democratic competition. They worried that politics, when abstracted from local contexts, engendered violent forms of antagonism and politicization. It also left the common man/woman—here the peasant—vulnerable to the ambitions and agendas of elite, urban politicians. This was why both Gandhi and Mukerjee wanted to prioritize political authority and participation at the local level since only in such contexts could people directly shape the political agenda as well as best judge the intentions of political actors and the consequences of political action.

Gandhi's recurring image of a nonhierarchical "oceanic circle" of innumerable *panchayats* voluntarily associating together shared many features with Mukerjee's "concentric" federation of functional assemblies. Gandhi, however, more thoroughly resisted the pyramidal structure of the state, an opposition to institutional hierarchy that pushed his style of decentralization into decidedly more antistatist and more individualistic directions. Mukerjee, by contrast, sought greater forms of social harmony and solidarity through mechanisms of decentralization. Devolution would both enable effective democratic participation and extend outward the forms of social cooperation, reciprocities, and communal ethics embodied in the village community. Mukerjee praised the village for its corporate communalism, "an ever-active responsible sociality", that could overcome the hyper-individualism of Western statism.[78] Gandhi, by contrast, conceived of the individual and the village as "integral" units, as

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[76] Gandhi, "Speech at Meeting of Deccan Princes", 371–2.

[77] Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 256.

[78] Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 195.

isomorphic sites of self-rule that, in their sociality, pointed to radically voluntarist forms of cooperation. For Gandhi,

every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces.[79]

If Mukerjee's village was the starting point of a "gradual federation resulting in ever-increasing concentric circles of authority",[80] then Gandhian decentralization was oriented towards the greater self-sufficiency and independence of self-ruling villages and individuals, "till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units".[81]

Gandhi's and Mukerjee's divergence in this respect is indicative of a persistent oscillation within pluralist thought, between an emphasis on the corporate group or the individual as the key site of resistance to state power. More organicist or corporatist conceptions were often premised on a critique of the extreme individualism of social-contract theory and utilitarianism. The group was understood as a prior moral and legal community and the primary location for the realization of freedom. Laski and Cole, by contrast, were strong defenders of individual conscience and judgment; group life mattered because it protected individual liberty against the claims of an overbearing state. But even here, there was a sense that this understanding of freedom would engender an individualism that was more oriented towards man as a "social being".[82] Cole was perhaps more theoretically consistent and more traditionally *socialist* in arguing that the impulse to association was natural to man; that is, a natural sociality rather than obligation to an artificial state was deemed the a priori foundation of political communities.[83]

Gandhi's pluralism, in this respect, was more individualist, yet it did not look to an adversarial or agonistic dynamic between the individual and the state as the mechanism for safeguarding individual liberty. Rather, Gandhi hoped that decentralization, and the forms of self-rule it enabled, would work to eventually

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[79] Gandhi, "Independence", 325–6.

[80] Mukerjee, *Democracies of the East*, 292.

[81] Gandhi, "Independence", 326.

[82] "It is an individualistic theory of the State . . . But is individualistic in so far as it asks of man that he should be a social being." Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty*, 24.

[83] "Men do not make communities—they are born and bred in them". G. D. H. Cole, *Social Theory* (London, 1920), 1. See also Peter Lamb, "G. D. H. Cole on the General Will: A Socialist Reflects on Rousseau", *European Journal of Political Theory* 4/3(2005), 283–300.

displace the state, a state understood to be inherently violent. At its telos, then, Gandhi's pluralism would be indistinguishable from a kind of anarchism. Indeed, Gandhi famously enunciated his ideal of a stateless society as an "enlightened anarchy in which each person is his own ruler".[84] What is distinctive about Gandhi's stateless ideal—what made his anarchy "enlightened"—was that it was not equivalent to the mere rejection of all forms of authority and their replacement by spontaneous cooperative orders. Rather, Gandhi's nonviolent polity would be implicated in the search for radically voluntary forms of rule and action, where *voluntary* would denote nonhierarchical forms of authority and disciplined forms of cooperation. The evolution to "perfect democracy" based upon "the rule of unadulterated non-violence"[85] required, in addition to an alternative, decentralized institutional order, critical transformations of the nature and practice of authority.

V. THE RULE OF NONVIOLENCE

In a 1934 interview with Nirmal Kumar Bose, in the midst of a discussion of state expropriation and ownership of land, Gandhi offered one of his sharpest objections to the modern state. "The State represents violence in concentrated and organized form"; it was "a soulless machine", and, therefore, could "never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence". Even egalitarian projects of land reform, if state-driven, would pose serious threats to freedom and self-rule; for Gandhi, "an increase of the power of the State" should be viewed "with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality".[86] Structurally, the violence of the state was associated with centralization and the concomitant concentration of wealth and power. Crucially, centralization was understood to entail distinct forms of authority—hierarchical and external—which made it "inconsistent with [a] non-violent structure of society".[87]

Gandhi's critique of the state is often subsumed under his well-known rejection of modern civilization and, in this vein, too quickly dismissed as naively traditionalist. While it is certainly true that the violence of centralization was associated with "factory civilization", Gandhi articulated a more precise worry about the moral foundations of the state. He was objecting to the specific way that the authority of the modern state—its legitimating structure—was also founded upon force and violence. The state's association with violence, while most obvious

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[84]   M. K. Gandhi, "Enlightened Anarchy—A Political Ideal (Jan 1939)", *CWMG*, 74: 380

[85]   M. K. Gandhi, "Hyderabad (8-10-1940)", *CWMG*, 79: 293.

[86]   M. K. Gandhi, "Interview to Nirmal Kumar Bose (9/10-11-34)", *CWMG*, 65: 318.

[87]   M. K. Gandhi, "Hand-Spun as Measure of Value (13-1-1942)", *CWMG*, 81: 424.

in its military and police apparatuses, was thought to brim under the surface of its fundamental political and legal institutions. Gandhi was peculiarly attentive to the externality of modern political institutions, the close association between law and force, and the strict conditions of obedience and disobedience; indeed, this was the cornerstone of the theory and practice of *satyagraha*. Gandhi insisted that for law to have a moral claim it could not command obedience through the threat of force. To obey a law out of fear of punishment was a sign of moral weakness and compliance out of fear served only to mask domination in the language of legitimacy. Indeed, when championing armed resistance as the means to capture the state, anticolonial nationalism only worked to cement these amoral foundations. This, for Gandhi, was the heart of the moral–psychological trauma wrought by imperialism, for in their subjection the oppressed come to believe that power or material inequality (be it in political, economic, technological, or military terms) can legitimate domination.

In rethinking the moral foundations of political authority, Gandhi sought ways to undo the association of rule with hierarchy and violence. Rejecting the structure and authority of the modern state was therefore the first step towards instantiating new ways of ruling that were not premised on the rightness of force and forging new kinds of political community that did not entail a hierarchy of the powerful over the weak and the reenactment of imperial subjection. In their most innovative formulations, *swaraj* and *satyagraha*—central concepts of Gandhian thought and practice—would be redefined in the direction of a distinct theory of politics. *Swaraj* would become a form of self-rule that reimagined the logic of *rule* as radically nonhierarchical, and *satyagraha* a principle of action that reimagined the logic of *action* as radically self-limiting.

In the manner in which the problem of state authority was posed, namely as an interrogation of the place of force in the legitimate bases of obedience, Gandhi's thought vividly resonates with an important angle of the pluralist critique of state sovereignty. Laski's reformulation of the theory of obligation also attempted to undo the tight imbrication of law and force in the modern theory of state sovereignty. For Laski, the state's theoretically uncontestable *right* to allegiance was, in practice, mediated, circumscribed, and constrained by a whole host of formal and informal institutions (such as public opinion).[88] Gandhi would also insist that the practical grounds of political subjection could never be reduced

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[88]   Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty*, chap. 1. Here, Laski was explicitly building upon an insight of Maine's. Maine had also considered the contractarian theory of obligation to be incomplete, that empirically and historically coercive force could not explain the logic of legal obligation. He wrote that though "the pupil of Austin may be tempted to forget that there is more in actual Sovereignty than force", in practice "a whole enormous aggregate of opinions, sentiments, beliefs, superstitions, and prejudices perpetually shapes, limits, or

to force alone. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi famously claimed that "the English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them".[89] Even the most coercive regimes persisted not strictly through the monopoly of force but rather through inculcating fear and weakness; that is, through some kind of acquiescence by the subjugated. This objection to traditional theories of obligation carried a more critical edge; for in pointing to the empirical fallacy of an authority based on pure force, Gandhi was also demonstrating its ultimate illegitimacy *and* instability. Gandhi's account sought to make visible the individual's active (even if unwitting) collusion in the production of authority and thereby underwrote the power of radical acts of withdrawal (i.e. a politics of noncooperation with unjust authority).

Noncooperation with existing authority would work alongside the active creation of *swaraj*, of self-governing institutions as well as new modes of voluntary association, authority, and rule. In its most expansive sense, Gandhian *swaraj* was implicated in fundamental transformations in all spheres of social life, from large-scale experimentation in decentralized economic and political forms to revitalizing practices of the self. Gandhi was especially attentive to the *means* of attaining *swaraj*, to modes of living and acting appropriate with the end of *swaraj*. Institutional design in the abstract was of little importance, especially compared to concerted attention to the forms of interaction and practices of self-rule that could sustain *swaraj*. Gandhi's politics were therefore oriented towards the transformation of relationships which animated and reproduced coercive structures. The burden of what Gandhi would call *constructive* as opposed to destructive *satyagraha* was how to create novel forms of voluntary association and bonds of authority that neither implied nor reimposed hierarchy and coercion. The privileged site for experimenting in constructive *satyagraha* was the village and the multifaceted program of village reform and revitalization known as the constructive programme.[90] This program came to enfold an expanding set of social, cultural, and economic reform campaigns—from the promotion of *khadi* and cottage industry, the abolition of untouchability and the striving for communal harmony, to campaigns for sanitation, education, and prohibition—which, while national in scope, had to be waged at the village level.

It was in the work of constructive reform that the exemplary model of Gandhian *satyagraha* took on its most novel dimensions. Gandhi was searching for a mode of effective action and interaction that, at the same time, did not

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forbids the actual direction of the forces of society by its Sovereign". Maine, *Early History of Institutions*, 360–61.

[89]   Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 261.

[90]   See especially M. K. Gandhi, "Constructive Programme—Its Meaning and Place (13–12-1941)", *CWMG*, 81: 355–74.

involve a sense of externality and imposition. For action and authority to be consistent with self-rule, they had to be radically voluntary and self-limiting. Gandhi's solution lay in *satyagraha* (and in an earlier vein, *swadeshi*),[91] conceived as a kind of self-disciplined and outwardly oriented political action. Gandhian self-rule, as we have seen, had to begin from the bottom up, from the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the individual and the village (construed isomorphically as integral units). Self-rule strove for freedom from dependence without forsaking modes of *voluntary* interdependence. But truly voluntary interdependence had to willed, it was dependent on a prior imperative towards autonomy.[92] Gandhi's recognition that "man is a social being" was therefore not a claim about the moral priority of the social over the individual; rather it taught man to "suppress his egotism" and thus taught the "lesson of humility".[93] Gandhian freedom, despite the intensity of its practices of self-discipline, did not seek its fulfillment in Hindu renunciation or Stoic indifference as commonly understood, but rather in cultivating a detached engagement with and towards society. It was a principle of self-discipline which sought to actively orient oneself towards the reform of that with which one was most intimate; that is, to insist that political action had to begin from the situatedness of the self in its most intimate worlds.

For Gandhi, constructive work was the practical analogue of decentralization, it was fundamental to the socioeconomic revival and political renewal of India as a whole. Gandhi understood the urgency of constructive work less in terms of political education or consciousness-raising than as fundamentally experiments in self-rule. When Gandhi was asked to define *swaraj*, he invariably turned to the constructive programme, for, in his words, "its wholesale fulfillment *is* complete independence".[94] Likewise, on the eve of his assassination, when Gandhi proposed disbanding the Congress Party, he imagined its reconstitution as an army of *satyagrahis* devoted solely to constructive work and the attainment of "social, moral and economic independence in terms of [India's] seven hundred thousand villages".[95]

The "ever-expanding, never-ascending" decentralized village polity was the institutional form of a nonviolent political order and was meant to be a direct counterpoint to the structural hierarchy of the modern state. So, too, the constructive programme as the only "truthful and non-violent way" to independence was key to imagining an alternative principle of self-rule and a

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91 Gandhi, "Speech on Swadeshi".
92 See Bose, *Studies in Gandhism*, chaps. 1 and 3.
93 M. K. Gandhi, "Our Helplessness (24-2-1929)", *CWMG*, 45: 104.
94 M. K. Gandhi, "Foreword to 'Constructive Programme—Its Meaning and Place' (13-11-1945)", *CWMG*, 88: 325.
95 Gandhi, "Draft Constitution of Congress", 333.

model of political action that were not premised on compulsion or coercive obligation.[96] Like the pluralists, Gandhi sought to refute the rightness of force as the foundation of the state, and thus objected to all forms of organization that were not voluntary. But while Gandhi's institutional answer to the problem of the state was comparable, his ideal form of a nonviolent polity was construed in more individualist and more antistatist terms.

In the work of Mukerjee and a number of British pluralists, the pluralist critique of the state was animated by a concern to raise the legitimacy of the social–corporate group as expressive of viable forms of collective freedom and social solidarity. The associative bonds of the social group—whether in the form of the guild or the village community—were argued to be proof of immanent or natural forms of sociability that did not require the intervention of political power (the state) to guarantee social cohesion. In this, the pluralists were challenging Hobbesian and contractual models of politics that viewed the artificial community forged via the state as the only legitimate form of political community (legitimate because it was argued to guarantee equality and liberty in ways that natural or partial associations could not). As we have seen, Gandhi was equally hostile to the idea that force could be the legitimate ground of political association, but it was less the social group than the self-ruling individual that was posited as the solution to the problem of domination. That is, unlike Mukerjee and Cole, Gandhi was deeply pessimistic about the ability of humans to naturally refrain from dominating and exploiting others (in this he was closer to Hobbes and Rousseau). Gandhi's solution, however, was adamantly opposed to the imposition of an external power to procure the peace or guarantee equality and freedom. For Gandhi, true freedom could neither survive such an imposition nor be sustained by the threat of force. Gandhian freedom was premised on a radical disciplining of the self, on the self-overcoming of the will to dominate, and living only by the law of nonviolence. For Gandhi, "the nearest approach to civilization based upon nonviolence is the erstwhile village republic of India". While admitting that "there was in it no non-violence of my definition and conception", nevertheless Gandhi insisted that "the germ was there".[97] It portended a society in which the individual would be the "architect of his own government" and the village would become a "perfect democracy based upon individual freedom".[98]

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96   Gandhi, "Foreword to 'Constructive Programme'", 325.
97   Gandhi, "The Charkha", 209
98   Gandhi, "Question Box", 113.