

Engaging the 'Long 1980s': On the Emergence of the Mission Mode of State- fabrication in India

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Abstract

This article argues that in India, the key period for locating morphings of the state on the ground is the period between 1977 and 1991, a period it calls 'the long 1980s'. It then identifies a key aspect of such changes as the emergence of the mission mode of state-fabrication in which work of the government increasingly happens through the various missions as opposed to the traditional way of delivering governmental programmes through the line departments. This has involved a shift towards 'quotidian logistics' of state-fabrication as opposed to the 'symbolic logistics' operational in the immediate aftermath of decolonisation involving the growing importance of 'social' technologies of statecraft. Fabricating the state in the mission mode has seen the governmental apparatus reaching deep into hitherto marginal rural areas and population groups through missions. The arguments offered in the article provide an alternative to the accounts of the processes of change in the governmental system offered by the 'passive revolution thesis'.

Keywords

State-fabrication, the long 1980s, mission mode, passive revolution thesis

Introduction

The last thirty years or so have seen wide-ranging changes in the functioning of the state in India and the attendant politics. A specific theoretical position, that can be termed as 'the passive revolution thesis', has been one of the most dominant and productive theoretical strands of looking at the state in India; this can be identified with the works of Kaviraj¹ and Chatterjee². Borrowing from Gramsci's

¹ S. Kaviraj, 'A Critique of the Passive Revolution', *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 45/47 (1988): 2429–33, 2436–41, 2443–44.

² Partha Chatterjee, 'Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?', in Partha Chatterjee, *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) and

idea of historical block, the theorists of this school seem to posit that the inability of the post-colonial nation state in India to undertake a bourgeois-led transformation of Indian agriculture and Indian society can be characterised as *passive revolution*. In India, one of the most widely cited and used descriptions of passive revolution to understand the dynamics of post-colonial politics is given by political theorist Sudipta Kaviraj. He used a coalitional class model to make sense of state and politics in India after decolonisation. He tried to show how the bourgeois-led dethroning of the older feudal classes in post-colonial India from an earlier position of exclusive dominance can be characterised as passive revolution.³

Further elaborations of the passive revolution thesis continue to be important in the attempts at understanding the Indian political in the contemporary conjuncture. One of the most important contemporary theoretical elaborations of the passive revolution thesis is the formulation of political society by the political theorist Partha Chatterjee. The way Chatterjee⁴ argues out the theory of political society is by constructing a narrative of difference through dichotomies such as the First World and the rest of the world, civil society and political society, citizens and populations, and corporate capital and non-corporate capital. Political society is the scaffolding that holds up this theoretical architecture by allowing the elaboration of this narrative of difference. In contemporary India, according to this formulation, the communities that are targets of governmental action for intended social transformation and management of populations constitute 'political society', whereas members of the bourgeois, and the forms of associational politics that this class indulges in, constitute civil society. And the reason for this specific strategy for the management of population groups seems to be to ensure the maintenance of the political architecture erected by passive revolution. The conceptual innovation of political society, thus, can be seen as a particularly important and influential extension of the 'passive revolution thesis' in terms of understanding the state in India.

The charge of the article is simultaneously positive as well as negative. While trying to offer an alternative vocabulary to understand transformations in the form of the state, it also identifies some key aspects of the passive revolution thesis and builds an argument against two of these strands. Some key aspects of the passive revolution thesis are: (a) in terms of disciplinarity, one needs a historical approach informed by political theory to understand the nature of the post-colonial state in India; (b) the key period of shift in the functioning of the state in India is the period surrounding decolonisation; (c) to make sense of the state in post-colonial India,

'The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories', in *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*.

³ For a relatively recent restating of this position with the First Amendment to the Indian Constitution as a case study, please refer to Nivedita Menon, 'Citizenship and the Passive Revolution: Interpreting the First Amendment', *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 18 (2004): 1812–19.

⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Delhi and Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2004).

one needs to give an account of politics; and (d) such politics can be understood as operating along a subaltern versus elite axis with the elites being recognised by the state as proper citizens constituting the civil society, whereas the subaltern masses constitute political society.

The body of scholarship on the state in India that applies this extension of the passive revolution thesis to the Indian case has been influential. It reflects and has consolidated three broad kinds of theoretical orientations in social sciences in India concerning the state. First, debates surrounding the state in India have happened around its 'nature'. Second, it has displaced questions surrounding the state into the realm of politics. Third, it has led to a historicist bias (that looks for historical continuities in the workings of the state), and sees the period of decolonisation as a significant watershed.

This article provides a counter-case to the passive revolution thesis so as to understand the changes in the functioning of the state and people's perception of it in a more legible fashion. It challenges this strand of theorising not so much by building an alternative theoretical account as by providing an alternative account of the processes surrounding the state in India through a small set of alternative conceptual vocabulary.

One can try to provide such an alternative in three ways. If one diagnoses a particular theoretical construct (in our case, 'passive revolution') as being, relatively speaking, unfruitful with respect to making transformations in social processes legible, and that one needs an alternative conceptualisation to do so, then three quite different kinds of responses are possible. The first kind of response does not take the identification of a specific historical process by the theoretical construct with which one is dialoguing with for granted. It tries to undertake conceptual innovations for both identifying a specific historical process and for explaining this through a set of conceptual innovations. The second kind of response agrees with the basics of the theoretical construct in the sense that it agrees with the identification of the specific socio-historical processes but disagrees with the attendant theoretical explanation. The third kind of response purportedly offers a critique of the theoretical construct in question, but the alternatives offered presume socio-historical processes that have been identified by/within the construct being contested.⁵

I argue that that this article offers the first kind of response to the passive revolution thesis. To be able to do so, one has to distinguish between two different aspects of arguments with respect to human societies: processes versus events. The events that scholars belonging to the passive revolution thesis describe and I deal with in this article (in a somewhat sketchy fashion) are the same/similar. But we do not describe the same processes, and therefore, do not describe the same social reality. For example, the arguments offered by this article are not dependent

⁵ This paragraph and the subsequent clarification owes substantially to the perceptive questions raised by an anonymous referee.

upon processes such as shifting coalitions of classes in India and the political ramifications of such a process.

Also, in a sense, this article tries to offer a ‘formal’ description of the processes involved rather than a ‘substantive’ one being offered by the scholars of the passive revolution thesis. It focuses on the forms through which we can understand changes surrounding ‘the state’. It identifies the mission mode (the increasing reliance on missions of various kinds for undertaking governmental activities) as a key trope through which we can make changes in the forms, perceptions and actions of the state legible.

This article points at a different temporality with respect to the changes in the functioning of the state. It argues that although significant changes surrounding socio-political processes did happen around the event of decolonisation, if one foregrounds the formal changes in the architecture of the governmental system (and not its substantive content—politics), then it is the period between 1977–91 (a period I term as ‘the long 1980s’) that assumes salience. Therefore, the argument that the long 1980s mark a period of important change does not deny the importance of the changes that happened during decolonisation in the period 1945–52. Rather, one posits that if one needs to understand the shifts in the workings of the state by giving formal accounts of, what I call, state-fabrication (rather than accounts of the politics imbricated in processes of state formation), then one needs to engage with the long 1980s in an adequate fashion. This article unfortunately does not do so. Rather, it provides some details about the changes that happened during the long 1980s, and points at the growth of the missions as one aspect, perhaps the most important aspect, of the transformations happening in this period.

This article does not provide a sympathetic account of the scholars or the literature of the ‘passive revolution thesis’. Instead, it argues at a tangent to this theoretical position by providing counter-narratives to some of its key strands as identified by this article. Therefore, parts of this article are not as detailed or properly sketched out as they should be or can be. That task remains to be achieved later; and therefore, the present article is schematic, to say the least.

Understanding Changes in the Form of the State in India

Narratives about the state, including those offered by the scholars of the passive revolution thesis, can be described and framed as narratives of state formation. These discussions, often of a Marxist and/or structuralist provenance, tend to discuss what they see as the nature of the state, and see the state as reflecting a certain class dynamic and class coalition in society.⁶ In this context, this article

⁶ For examples of this position, please refer to the following: G.M. Joseph and D. Nugent, ‘Popular Culture and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico’, in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. G.M. Joseph and D. Nugent (Durham

takes a self-consciously non-structuralist turn, and tries to displace questions surrounding state formation in India by providing descriptions of state-fabrication. In doing this, it borrows from the understanding of gender as fabrication as formulated by feminist scholar Judith Butler.⁷ According to Butler, ‘Genders, then, can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent’.⁸ Further, ‘that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’.⁹ Following Butler, this article argues that questions surrounding the state need to shift from concerns surrounding its nature and its ontological status to the various acts that constitute it.

In this context, British sociologist Philip Abrams’ formulations are also very insightful and perceptive, and the arguments and formulations offered in this article may be read as a gloss on the set of arguments he makes in his article, ‘Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State’.¹⁰ The idea of state-fabrication helps us to operationalise Abrams’ advice as to not believe in ‘the state’ as an entity. Abrams alerts us to what he terms as the ideological nature of the effects of believing in the state as an entity, splits ‘the state’ analytically into the state idea and the state system, and makes both of these available for research. This article borrows from the broad form of the argument that he makes. In keeping with Abrams’ formulation that there is no need to study ‘the state’ over and above the ‘state system’ and the ‘state idea’, this article takes the governmental apparatus as the locus of its analysis.¹¹

But to be able to do this, it makes a different analytical distinction within the state as an implicit construct; this is the difference between form and substance with respect to the descriptions of ‘the state’. It has to be noted here though that this distinction is not within ‘the body’ of ‘the state’, but is about the descriptions we generate about it. Thus, the argument offered is not that ‘the state’ has forms and substances/entities that inhere in it, but that we can and must differentiate between two ways of describing the state: the formal one and the substantive one. The formal one refers to descriptions of state system and state idea based on their formal characteristics; the substantive one refers to the ‘content’, the social dynamic of the practices of the state system, or to put it in a single word—politics.

and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 3–23; D. Sayer, ‘Everyday Forms of State Formation: Some Dissident Remarks on “Hegemony”’, in *Everyday Forms of State Formation*, ed. Joseph and Nugent (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 367–77; C. Krohn-Hansen and K.G. Nustad, ‘Introduction’, in *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. C. Krohn-Hansen and K.G. Nustad (London and Ann Harbour: Pluto Press, 2005), 3–26.

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999); and ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 528.

⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173.

¹⁰ Philip Abrams, ‘Notes of the Difficulty of Studying the State’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58–89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Most purported descriptions of the state, especially of ‘the state’ in India, end up being descriptions of politics. This article is an attempt at providing a formal description of changes in the practices inhering in the state system in India.

Accounts that have tried to bring the state back as an object of enquiry have tried to study it as an actual organisation. These approaches have, in turn, been critiqued for not taking into account the boundary problem between state and society. Instead, powerful post-structuralist arguments have been made to see the state as a structural effect of practices that make the state appear to exist.¹² But even seeing the state as an effect of actions sees it as being separate and distinct from these actions in the sense that this still posits that the state exists as an entity ‘in itself’ and has a cognisable and separate ontological status even though this is seen as comprising and cohering as a result of actions and practices. Whereas what is needed is to be able to generate descriptions of what is conventionally understood and referred to as the state that do not necessarily try and offer theories of surrounding ‘the nature’ of the state.

Therefore, here the parallels with Butler’s notions of fabrication to understand gender are of help. Butler does not merely argue that gender is an effect of a set of actions; instead she argues for a notion of gender that is constitutive of these actions. Therefore, the analytical move that Butler makes is to shift the focus from body to performativity.¹³ It is in this sense that this article sees the state system in India as being fabricated and not as being formed; it does so by shifting the focus of debates about the nature of the state in India to the actions that seem constitutive of it and the formal characteristics of the state system and governmental actions. Hence, it describes processes of state-fabrication rather than those of state formation.

As opposed to the structuralism implicit in the passive revolution formulation and its extension with respect to political society, this article takes a deliberately non-structuralist approach. This approach deliberately takes the present and the most immediately available layer of state-fabrication as the starting point and then works downward. Each passing layer shapes the understanding of the subsequent one. So, in terms of legibility of social practices and processes, this approach presupposes that institutions and processes do not supplant each other. Each layer, to use a visual metaphor, refracts our understanding of the other and thus contains the other. Thus, the argument offered is that successive modes of state-fabrication do not supplement the earlier ones; the emergent mode adds just another layer to the fabrications of the state. Because our vantage point is the present, the more recent modes loom larger.

If ‘the state’ is a fabrication, a contingent achievement in space and time that is constitutive only of actions, both with respect to the state system and the state

¹² Timothy Mitchell, ‘The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critiques’, *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77–96.

¹³ Please refer to the literature cited in note 7.

idea, then this article argues that it can be fabricated in many ways. A mode of fabrication specifically refers to the organisational forms and technologies of government through which such fabrication takes place. In the Indian context, this article identifies two modes of state-fabrication, one of which is the mission mode through which processes of state-fabrication started operating starting in the mid-1980s. This mode of state-fabrication uses social technologies to a much larger extent than the preceding departmental mode of state-fabrication.

The section that follows tries to locate changes in forms of governmental action with respect to the perceptual domains that frame such changes. The section after it tries to provide a different temporality (what I call the 'long 1980s') for looking at restructuring the Indian social and the attendant changes in the forms of governmental action. The following section tries to provide a formal account of processes of shifts surrounding the state by giving accounts of processes of state-fabrication rather than of state formation. The final section before the conclusion extends this formal account by detailing three of the tactics through which such a particular mode of state-fabrication is achieved. By reading governmental action as a species of tactic and not strategy, this article tries to move beyond the readings of governmental actions as being suffused with strategic intentionalities that originate in certain bounded spaces; the operation of these tactics combine to produce a web-like weaving of the state.

There to Here: Regimes¹⁴ of Visibility and Tactility

The scholars of the passive revolution thesis argue for long-range historical continuities in the workings of the state in India. But as already mentioned, the period surrounding decolonisation is seen as a crucial period of transformations in the state and politics. This was effected by a broad-based class coalition involving the emergent national bourgeois, the old landed elite and the professional/bureaucratic classes. This section, in a schematic fashion, tries to provide an alternative account of processes of changes without resorting to the categories of 'class' and 'power'.

One of the dominant tropes that governed actions of the colonial state and the various 'enlightened' native rules of the various princely states was one of

¹⁴ Regimes of state-fabrication refer to the perceptual domain of the processes through which state is fabricated. In other words, regimes of state formation refer to the processes by which the state is made available for perception and action by the people. In the Indian context, this article identifies two such regimes: regime of visibility and regime of tactility. The regime of visibility corresponds to the departmental mode of state-fabrication, whereas the regime of tactility corresponds to the mission mode of state-fabrication. Generally, the state-society relationship gets framed through narratives of the ways in which citizens and/or subjects 'experiences' the state. Instead, by talking about regimes, I introduce a conceptual space that helps us talk about state-society relationship through a perceptual account.

‘improvement’.¹⁵ This started morphing into a discourse surrounding development towards the end of the colonial era in the country.¹⁶ The logic of colonialism in India was based on utilitarian philosophy that justified the colonial occupation of the country by appealing to the material and moral benefits that apparently flowed to India and Indians through such colonial association.¹⁷ The nationalist challenge in the first quarter of the twentieth century produced cracks in such a project, and development started growing as a discourse that helped the late-colonial governments contain nationalist articulations based on the principles of representative democracy and responsible government. The nationalist position commonly identified with Nehru—that of planned/mixed economy—emerged out of a particular negotiation with colonial modernity. The self-representation of colonialism was that of a modernising force; this meant that a large extent of resistance to colonialism was articulated from the terrain of what was seen as tradition. Nehruvian nationalism can be identified with another route to modernity—socialism—which was self-consciously against colonialism and capitalism. Thus, a development imaginary, of the socialist/planned variety, was used against colonialism by the nationalist elite quite successfully. If bringing progress and improvements was the reason colonialists gave for their continuing presence despite nationalist challenges, the nationalist challenge itself became premised upon the promise that a social democratic, national government would be able to deliver development better. The argument against colonialism was as much based on ‘ethical’ reasons such as the morality of one people ruling over another as it was on the promises of democratic socialism.¹⁸

Thus, it can be argued that there was no necessary discursive opposition between democracy and development at the time of Indian independence; in fact, the very promise of independence and democracy would have been incomplete

¹⁵ B. Zachariah, ‘Uses of Scientific Argument: The Case of “Development” in India, c. 1930–1950’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 39 (2001): 3689–702; M. Mann, ‘Dealing with Oriental Despotism: British Jurisdiction in Bengal, 1772–93’, in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed. H. Fischer-Tiné and M. Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 29–48; and C. Gowda, ‘Advance Mysore!: The Cultural Logic of a Developmental State’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 29 (2010): 88–95.

¹⁶ B. Zachariah, *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History c. 1930–1950* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005) and ‘Uses of Scientific Argument’. See also P. Chatterjee, ‘Development Planning and the Indian State’, in *State and Politics in India*, ed. P. Chatterjee (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 271–97.

¹⁷ M. Mann, ‘Dealing with Oriental Despotism’.

¹⁸ S. Kaviraj, *The Trajectories of the Indian State: Politics and Ideas* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010); *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and ‘A Critique of the Passive Revolution’. See also S. Bose, ‘Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development: India’s Historical Experience’, in *Comparative Perspective in International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. F. Cooper and R. Packard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 45–63; Zachariah, *Developing India*; V. Gidwani, *Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

without ‘development’ no matter how tentatively defined. Therefore, during the time of independence, the broad conceptual frame of development had already been set up in India. This, of course, had its critiques from important architects of the Indian freedom movement, most importantly from Gandhi. But despite important critiques, it is this particular consensus surrounding development that seems to have been important in the aftermath of decolonisation.

There was consensus amongst the nationalist elite that development was a desirable goal. The socialist experience with planning was seen as a desirable route through which rapid economic growth could be achieved. The Indian National Congress itself had formed groups for economic development plans even before independence. So, by the time of independence, the development imaginary had become an essential part of the democratic aspirations as articulated by a dominant section of the nationalist elite. This was reflected by the creation of a certain institutional architecture as exemplified in the formation of the Planning Commission.¹⁹

The development imaginary as it congealed during independence saw the whole country as its site and the whole population of India as its target. The first five-year plan that took off in 1951 lacked a clear focus. But by the second plan, there was greater alignment between the national development imaginary in India and the international development discourse. The second plan document clearly focused on a dual-sector growth model and focused on industry as the driver of economic growth. Agriculture was ‘necessarily’ neglected.²⁰ This period was characterised by heavy investments in sectors that made the state visible.

As Roy argues,²¹ too much attention has been paid till now to beliefs—or the shared sentiments—that create entities such as nations and the politics attendant upon such creation. Instead of an account of beliefs and emotions surrounding the nation state, she gives the examples of parades, steel towns, etc., through which the state made itself available to people in India in the aftermath of decolonisation. Thus, with respect to the post-colonial state, Roy performs an important manoeuvre; she shifts the focus from the apparently affective constitutiveness of the nation state to the ways in which the state makes itself perceptually available to people.

I take this insight forward by focusing on processes of state-fabrication; when we do this focusing, something striking emerges—this process in the immediate aftermath of independence is premised upon creating a certain regime of visibility. Although the investments in capital goods industries and heavy industries (especially steel), large and prestigious higher education institutions and big dams were couched in the language of modernisation and development,

¹⁹ S. Bose, ‘Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development’; Chatterjee, ‘Development Planning and the Indian State’.

²⁰ Bose, ‘Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development’.

²¹ S. Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

their *effect* was in terms of creating a regime of visibility. The logistics²² of state-fabrication involved in creating this regime was what I call the symbolic logistics of state-fabrication. In the immediate aftermath of decolonisation, the post-colonial state did not reach too deep into village society; instead, telltale symbols of its potency and majesty were manufactured through symbolic logistics. These involve, as Roy details,²³ processes as different and varied as the creation of steel towns such as Rourkela, creation of new public rituals such as the Republic Day parades and the creation of big dams as part of multipurpose river valley projects as all too visible symbols of the existence and majesty of the state.

The actual number of people who might have worked in these steel towns and big dams and other such visible developmental interventions might have been small, and their immediate impact might have been limited. But these structures, in a physical, sensory way, made the state available to people. The state that was distant and almost invisible or rarely visible in a material sense during the colonial era (apart from its coercive apparatus) was still distant for most people, but it now became increasingly visible through its developmental interventions. From a distant and invisible state, there was now a state that was distant, yet visible. Although it must be acknowledged here that this point is contentious. Public works programmes did precede independence, especially in the irrigation sector. But apart from its extractive and disciplinary apparatus, ordinary Indians often had very little contact with the colonial state although it did affect their lives significantly and materially.

Thus, the state was shifted into the regime of representations in a double sense: first, the legitimacy that the state now drew for rule was predominantly through a process of representative democracy. Second, and perhaps equally important, the body of the state morphed in a manner so as to configure a regime of visibility in which the state and its majesty was represented through gargantuan public works programmes such as multipurpose river valley projects²⁴ or public sector steel plants and steel townships. In fact, as some scholars have argued, the steel townships²⁵ and the new higher educational and scientific institutions such as

²² The logistics of state-fabrication, in a given temporal context, refers to the operational manoeuvre corresponding to a specific regime through which a particular mode of state-fabrication functions on the ground. This article identifies two different kinds of logistics—symbolic logistics and quotidian logistics—corresponding to the regimes of visibility and tactility respectively. Quotidian logistics is imbricated in the functioning of mission mode of state-fabrication. Despite the military connotation of the word logistic that refers to operations in a strategic space, logistics of state-fabrication are contingent upon tactical manipulations of time rather than creating strategic spaces that allow for intentionalities to manifest themselves.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ D. Klingensmith, *'One Valley and a Thousand': Dams, Nationalism, and Development* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁵ Roy, *Beyond Belief*; J. Parry and C. Struempell, 'On the Desecration of Nehru's "Temples": Bhilai and Rourkela Compared', *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 19 (2008): 47–57.

the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)²⁶ and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) laboratories²⁷ were as much an investment towards development as they were towards creating a new kind of citizenry for the new democracy, the new citizen who was free of the narrow confines of region, religion and caste and could contribute significantly towards the nation-building process. This regime of visibility could function by redefining the whole of India as a dark land characterised by divisive forces and ignorant masses that needed to be developed.

But the act of development was not carried out through consensus or participation of the masses. The project of development was operationalised through a bureaucratic apparatus inherited from the colonial state. For example, district-level administration was still carried out through the older structures of bureaucracy, with the collector as the district in-charge. The bureaucracy for development multiplied in number, new departments were created under the older ministries, and sometimes even new ministries were created. There was increasing governmental activity in almost all spheres of life; but the form of the state that carried out these activities still operated through the old colonial structure, primarily comprising of departments and boards, despite some ruptures.²⁸ Over a period of time, the sheer multiplication of the developmental bureaucracy and overall changes in the Indian social produced certain morphings of the state that, by the long 1980s, changed the very logic and logistics of state-fabrication.

Development functioned as a homogenising field during this period in the immediate aftermath of decolonisation in which the whole of India was represented as underdeveloped and as needing improvement and development.²⁹ By the 1980s, cracks started appearing in this discursive field³⁰—the geography of development started being disaggregated into developed and underdeveloped regions. The process of identifying backward districts started from 1960 onwards, but it congealed into official discourse only in the long 1980s. The Planning Commission formed the National Committee on the Development of Backward Areas (Sivaraman Committee) in 1978 that submitted its report in 1981.³¹

With this, the process of operation of development drew to its logical conclusion in some respects. The post-war development regime functioned by dividing the world into the First, Second and Third worlds,³² and India was definitely a part

²⁶ S. Deb, *The IITians: The Story of a Remarkable Indian Institution and How its Alumni are Reshaping the World* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2004).

²⁷ Roy, *Beyond Belief*.

²⁸ Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State'; Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*.

²⁹ Zachariah, 'Uses of Scientific Argument'.

³⁰ Gidwani, *Capital, Interrupted*.

³¹ R. Bandyopadhyay and S. Datta, 'Strategies for Backward-area Development: A Systems Approach', *The Journal of the Operational Research Society* 40, no. 9 (1989): 737–51.

³² A. Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

of the Third World. By the long 1980s, the development geography of India no longer appeared as uniformly backward. The development regime had morphed through a logic of differentiation. The same logic of differentiation that converted a teleology of progress into a contemporaneous differentiated spatial geography at an international level, now operated on a national stage dividing the Indian geography into backward districts and non-backward districts. The Sarma Committee report identified the 100 most backward districts in India.³³ This process of fabricating new vocabularies of rule and tactics of interventions was, of course, intricate and multifaceted; I have pointed to only one aspect of this process here, that of creation of ‘backward’ districts.

The Long 1980s: The Need for a Refocusing

This brings us to the period that, I propose, is crucial with respect to transformations in the formal architecture of the state in India and its operational modalities—the long 1980s. As posited by the passive revolution thesis, the period surrounding decolonisation was indeed important with respect to transformations in society and politics in India. But this section argues that if we shift the focus to changes in the morphings of the formal architecture of the state, then the period identified here as the long 1980s assumes greater salience. This section provides an account of such processes without getting into a discussion about the reasons for such changes.

There are partial accounts of all these processes; but all these accounts are accounts of politics, or of political history. There is no single account that sees the long 1980s as a conjuncture that marked a significant restructuring of the Indian social. I argue that one of the important markers of such a restructuring of the Indian social was a re-engineering of the formal architecture of the state in India.

The long 1980s is the period between 1977, when Indira Gandhi’s emergency regime was democratically thrown out of office and the first non-Congress government was established at the centre, and 1991, when P.V. Narasimha Rao became the Prime Minister after a brief experimentation with coalition governments at the centre. It is towards the end of this period that the then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh, paved the way to removing regulations that had purportedly stymied economic growth, and took India out of the licence–permit raj into the era of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

The key events that marked the two ends of this period are significant both in a material and in a symbolic sense. The decision by Indira Gandhi to hold elections, the subsequent electoral losses suffered by the Congress in the 1977 general elections and the peaceful transition of regimes marked the maturing of

³³ Planning Commission, *Report of the Inter-ministry Task-group on Redressing Growing Regional Imbalances* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 2005), http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/taskforce/inter/inter_reg.pdf (accessed 11 May 2011).

democracy in India and the widespread acceptance of the idea and practices of republican, representative democracy, if not of its institutions. This meant that it was now possible to see the workings of the state at the national level as different from the workings and politics of one political party.³⁴

But the long 1980s have not been discussed as an important period of our recent history, as is warranted. This section of the article details the long 1980s (although per se this period is not the exclusive focus of this article) since I argue that the temporal conjuncture in which radical shifts occurred in the perceptions and actions of 'the state' was during this period, rather than around the period surrounding decolonisation as posited by the scholars of the 'passive revolution thesis'.

For example, Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam, in their well-argued volume, *Power and Contestation: India since 1989*, provide us with a picture of the changing dynamics of various aspects of politics and economics in contemporary India, including caste, ethnicity, region and religion. They also frame one significant strand of 'the economic' in this new India as being marked by 'accumulation by dispossession', which is a reworking of Kaviraj's formulation of the dialectic between democracy and development/bureaucracy as overdetermining the experience of the Indian political. However, this volume completely leaves out the tumultuous 1980s.³⁵

While 1991–92 was a significant marker of a new era of liberalisation, a large part of the changes that marked this period had been underway since the time Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister in 1984.³⁶ So, in some sense, P.V. Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh did not start a radically new phase but merely consolidated a process that had begun much earlier. The long 1980s marked not only changes that were political in nature but also changes involving a restructuring of the terrains of the social. The relationships between the social, the political and the economic were renegotiated along with changes in the structuring of the state. So far, the focus of dominant scholars has been to look at the fracturing of the national project/project of the nation state,³⁷ and then posit why and how the nation state in India has stayed together as a coherent entity.³⁸ Although it should be clarified here that these two orders of determination are not symmetrical nor do they follow each other necessarily.

Even when the 1980s get discussed, for example, in *India after Gandhi* by Ramachandra Guha,³⁹ the focus still remains on political history, and this particular account by Guha stops at the year 1989. Discrete histories exist of the 1980s. For

³⁴ R. Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New Delhi: MacMillan, 2007).

³⁵ N. Menon and A. Nigam, *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2008).

³⁶ P. Balakrishnan, 'Economic Consequences of Rajiv Gandhi', *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 6 (1990): 301–04.

³⁷ Chatterjee, 'The Nation and Its Fragments'.

³⁸ Guha, *India after Gandhi*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

most historians/sociologists, the dominant trend of the 1980s was twofold—the extension and deepening of democracy through a process of electoral churning through which a large number of hitherto underprivileged communities came to participate in formal politics;⁴⁰ and the almost simultaneous growth of the Hindu Right.⁴¹ Thus, the long 1980s have been generally framed by narratives around the restructuring of the terrain of politics in which the Nehruvian consensus surrounding the language and grammar of politics in India seems to be radically disintegrating through various populist attacks.

There is a need to focus on the long 1980s as a lost decade, a decade lost not to action/practice, but to academic theorising in sociology/anthropology/political science/history of the present. There is an urgent need for scholarship on this decade to make sense of our contemporaneity. It is the 1980s that mark a significant acceleration in the growth trajectory achieved in the 1950s.⁴² The mid-1980s also mark a regime change with respect to the Indian stock market, especially the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE).⁴³ This is sometimes attributed to a change of policies starting from the late 1970s that resulted in shifting the economy to a different growth, performance and productivity trajectory.⁴⁴ The information technology (IT) industry also took off during this period, with IT exports growing from a mere \$3 million in 1980 to \$128 million in 1990.⁴⁵ This is also the period in which the service sector begins to play an important role in economic growth and in the imaginary of the Indian economy.⁴⁶

The 1980s marked the growth of ‘techno-populism’—the growth of the telecom industry and the ubiquitous subscriber trunk dialling (STD) booths—often

⁴⁰ C. Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd, 2003); K. Chandra, ‘The Transformation of Ethnic Politics in India: The Decline of Congress and the Rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Hoshiarpur’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 1 (2000): 26–61; A. Kohli, ‘Introduction’, in *The Success of India's Democracy*, ed. Atul Kohli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1–19.

⁴¹ C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); M.C. Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008); B. Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilisation* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London and Singapore: SAGE, 2009).

⁴² D. Nayyar, ‘Economic Growth in Independent India: Lumbering Elephant or Running Tiger?’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 15 (2006): 1451–58.

⁴³ P. Basu and M.R. Morey, ‘Stock Market Prices in India after Economic Liberalisation’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 7 (1998): 355–58.

⁴⁴ D. Rodrik and A. Subramanian, ‘From “Hindu Growth” to Productivity Surge: The Mystery of the Indian Growth Transition’, IMF Working Paper WP/04/77, 2004, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2004/wp0477.pdf> (accessed 26 July 2011).

D. Nayyar, ‘Economic growth in independent India: lumbering elephant or running tiger?’ *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 15 (2006): 1451–1458.

⁴⁵ J. Dedrick and K.L. Kraemer, ‘Information Technology in India: The Quest for Self-reliance’, *Asian Survey* 33, no. 5 (1993): 463–92.

⁴⁶ N. Jadhav, R. Ranjan and S. Hajra, *Re-emerging India: A Global Perspective* (Hyderabad: The ICAFI University Press, 2005); S. Joshi, ‘Tertiary Sector-driven Growth in India: Impact on Employment and Poverty’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 37 (2004): 4175–78.

attributed to the policy changes and programmatic interventions of Sam Pitroda, a key technocrat in the Rajiv Gandhi regime during the period 1984–89.⁴⁷ This period also marked the growth of the television industry with momentous impact as chronicled by Rajagopal.⁴⁸ This was paralleled with the rapid growth of the industries related to cultural production, for example, the expansion and maturing of the audio cassette industry.⁴⁹ The long 1980s were also the ‘decade’ in which the Indian middle classes—politically assertive, socially conservative and economically ambitious—grew in number as well as in importance.⁵⁰

As has been chronicled by many commentators, this period marked a certain tectonic shift in Indian politics. India moved away from a single ruling party democracy (at the national level) to a genuine multiparty democratic system through a process of churning that included many hitherto marginalised caste groups getting shares in political power at the state and national levels through opportunistic coalition-building exercises.⁵¹ Tied to this story has been a radical interrogation of the ‘secular’ Indian state by the Hindu Right. In the beginning of the long 1980s, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had only single-digit number of members in the Indian Parliament and marginal political power; towards the end of this, it had become the pole around which Indian politics revolved.⁵² This is also the period that saw challenges to and interrogation of the state in India from hitherto marginal areas and actors, and various social movements. Challenges to the state also came from other national imaginaries, most important of them being the Punjabi, Kashmiri and the Naga ones. The long 1980s were the high noon of ‘terrorism’, with the late 1980s marked with a heightened viciousness.⁵³

The global narrative that has generally framed the processes discussed in this and the previous two sections is the failure of the older developmental state. The 1980s were the decade that bought forth criticisms (nationally as well as internationally, from academic and activist quarters) that development is a god that had failed.⁵⁴ In India, a central claim made was that despite more than around

⁴⁷ P. Chakravarty, ‘Telecom, National Development and the Indian State: A Postcolonial Critique’, *Media, Culture & Society* 26, no. 2 (2004): 227–49.

⁴⁸ A. Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ R. Sundaram, ‘Revisiting the Pirate Kingdom’, *Third Text* 23, no. 3 (2009): 335–45.

⁵⁰ P. Mishra, *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* (London, Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2006).

⁵¹ Y. Yadav, ‘Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India’s Third Electoral System, 1989–99’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, nos 34 and 35 (1999): 2393–99.

⁵² T.B. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁵³ B.D. Metcalf and T.R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Guha, *India after Gandhi*.

⁵⁴ W. Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Books, 1992); A. Escobar, *Encountering Development*; J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

four decades of development planning, matters on the ground in significant parts of the country and in many key sectors had not changed much.⁵⁵

This was part of a broader restructuring of the Indian social. Parallel to such simultaneous restructurings of Indian society, polity and economy were radical transformations in the formal architecture of the state in India. The regime of visibility no longer saturated the imperatives of development as representation; the imperatives had changed, and a new mode of state-fabrication had emerged.

Emergence of the Mission Mode of State-fabrication

In the long 1980s, one finally sees the emergence of the mission mode of state-fabrication. The narrative offered here is a response to the class analysis offered as the dynamic of political change by the passive revolution thesis. Instead of giving an account of the substantive politics with respect to the shifting coalitions of/between classes and/or other social groups as offered by this thesis, the present section tries to provide a more 'formal' account of the changes in the architecture of the Indian state that marked substantive innovations with respect to institutional architecture and governmental practice.

The assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 brought Rajiv Gandhi into office—the youngest Prime Minister of India till date. He tried to undo the past legacy of corruption, and the initial period of his regime was characterised by promises of introduction of a new era in Indian politics based on a freer economy and rapid technological modernisation.⁵⁶ A significant aspect of this approach was the creation of six technology missions in sectors such as drinking water, immunisation, literacy, oilseeds and telecommunications.⁵⁷ The technocrat Sam Pitroda played a key role in this process. This changed approach to governance is termed as 'managerialism', and the period 1980–89 as an era of techno-populism.⁵⁸ In contrast to such a reading, this article argues that the growth of missions, instead of ending in the 1980s, has led to the emergence of a specific mode of state-fabrication, even intensifying after this period of time.

Under the prime ministership of Rajiv Gandhi, the Government of India started the National Literacy Mission for increasing literacy rates in the country.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁵ W.A. Byrd, 'Planning in India: Lessons from Four Decades of Development Experience', *Journal of Comparative Economics* 14, no. 4 (1990): 713–35.

⁵⁶ Chakravarty, 'Telecom, National Development and the Indian State'.

⁵⁷ S. Pitroda, 'Development, Democracy and the Village Telephone', *Harvard Business Review* 71, no. 6 (1993): 66–79.

⁵⁸ Chakravarty, 'Telecom, National Development and the Indian State'.

⁵⁹ A. Bordia and A. Kaul, 'Literacy Efforts in India', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 520 (1992): 151–62.

older ways of doing development were seen as not producing results fast enough, in a time-bound fashion. The growth of the mission mode has to be seen in this context. Over the last twenty-five years or so, missions at the national, state and district levels have been formed to govern sectors as diverse as health, education, water and sanitation, horticulture and livelihoods.

With the goal of provisioning safe and accessible drinking water to backward rural areas, the National Drinking Water Mission (NDWM) was started in 1986 that was renamed as the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNDWM) in 1991.⁶⁰ The National Horticulture Mission was started in 2005–06 by the Government of India to promote horticulture in India in an integrated manner.⁶¹ Although technically not a mission, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan⁶² was launched in November 2000 to universalise primary education, following a conference of state education ministers in 1998 that recommended pursuing this goal in a mission mode. Because it was seen as a special measure, it was funded from a 2 per cent cess levied on all taxes collected that was later increased to 3 per cent in March 2007.⁶³

The National Rural Health Mission was initiated on 12 April 2005 to address needs of the rural health sector. A key objective for the creation of this mission was to provide support to the creation of the primary healthcare structures in the laggard states. It also tried to factor in the apparent need to incorporate the non-governmental sector to strengthen the public health system to improve access to healthcare by the poor. By 2008–09, the central government had released ₹28,408 crore under this mission.⁶⁴

The National Solar Mission was launched by the Government of India in 2007 to augment solar-powered electricity generation and reduce carbon emissions⁶⁵ that was later renamed as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission. With the urban poor increasingly in focus and cities being seen as the drivers of economic growth, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) was launched by the new Congress-led coalition government on 3 December 2005

⁶⁰ Planning Commission, *Evaluation Study on Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNDWM): PEO Report No 204* (New Delhi: Programme Evaluation Organisation, Planning Commission, 2010), http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/peo_rgndwm.pdf (accessed 23 July 2011).

⁶¹ S. Mittal, *Can Horticulture be a Success Story for India? Working Paper No 197* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, 2007).

⁶² It is a programme of the Government of India. The literal translation of the word *abhiyan* is 'campaign' and therefore, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan can be literally translated as the 'Campaign for Education for All'.

⁶³ G.S. Kainth, 'A Mission Approach to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan', *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 30 (2006): 3288–91.

⁶⁴ A.K. Sharma, 'National Rural Health Mission: Time to Take Stock', *Indian Journal of Community Medicine* 34, no. 3 (2009): 175–82.

⁶⁵ B. Harriss-White, S. Rohra and N. Singh, 'Political Architecture of India's Technology System for Solar Energy', *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 47 (2009): 49–60.

with a proposed investment of ₹50,000 crore. This was budgeted to be spent in the mission period of seven years beginning with the year 2005–06.⁶⁶

As these examples show, almost all aspects of doing governmental work, especially those related to developmental activities have been brought under various missions, and increasingly large amounts of money have been routed through these missions as opposed to the older organs of the government. The mission mode of state-fabrication is changing the very form of the state on the ground. It has also meant significantly changing the operational conceptualisation of development; instead of a teleology of progress mapped onto some indefinite future, missions are attempts at domesticating developmental time. They have fixed time horizons through which they try and attempt fulfilling specific quantifiable goals. Although development as a discourse operates by translating apparent spatial hierarchies into a temporal teleology through regimes of statistics and other statist practices, the logic of temporal teleology pushes the desirable goals of development into an ever-receding future. In a fundamental sense, the First World needs the Third World for its self-definition. The mission mode of state-fabrication tries to pull this ever-receding horizon of developmental time into the near and immediate future and aims at delivering goals within stipulated, predetermined periods of time. This is, in some sense, a peculiar elaboration of the earlier goals of developmental planning through new organisational forms and tactics.

The mission mode of state-fabrication has involved changing the configuration of the ways in which government functions on the ground and the state is fabricated through quotidian logistics. Governmental organisations have started functioning like non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the mission mode. The mode radically increases the number of state functionaries on the ground, and also nodes of contact between state and society. A regime of tactility now started overlaying the extant regime of visibility. The premise of governmental action for development seems to be to ‘reach out’ and ‘touch’ as many lives as possible. What this means is a new focus on hitherto unreached communities and ‘backward’ regions and districts that are then ‘targeted’ with the deployment of governmental tactics. The increasing nodes of state–society interaction seem to be premised upon the logic of creation of a regime of tactility.

The fabrication of the state in the mission mode involved tactics that allow the state to shed its symbolic majesty and come into routine contact with marginal communities and regions. The emergence of this mode has been concomitant with the emergence of social technologies such as self-help groups, microcredit and micro-watershed development committees.

⁶⁶ D. Mahadevia, ‘NURM and the Poor in Globalising Mega Cities’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 31 (2006): 55–63.

D. Kundu, and D. Samanta, ‘Redefining the inclusive urban agenda in India’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 5 (2011): 55–63.

Tactics of State-fabrication⁶⁷ in the Mission Mode

In this context, this section details the rules of operations and modes of availability through which the state appears within the emergent quotidian logistics of state-fabrication. The arguments offered here try to sidestep the debates surrounding state formation by offering a formal description of tactics involved in the mission mode.⁶⁸ I mention here only three tactics of operation: the first is that of multiplication of nodes of contact with society; the second is the expansion of the body of the state by incorporation of other types of organisations such as NGOs; and the third is that of provisionalisation of the organisations of the state/governmental apparatus. This is not to say that these are the only three tactics that are available, or that only these three are always dominant. These three are merely illustrative.

Multiplication (of Nodes of Contact between State and Society)

By self-definition, a node (in the context of this article) is a point of contact between state and society. With the growth of the missions in various sectors, there has been a mushrooming of such nodes at various levels. For example, missions are not only formed at the levels of the central and state governments but also at the district level. There has been a growth in the number of institutions at various levels at which governmental institutions used to exist earlier as well as a growth of new institutions at lower levels. These include village-level micro-watershed development committees and school development committees. These institutions act as the nodes of interface between state and society.

Such penetration of the government through newer organisational forms and processes has sometimes been framed within narratives of extension of state power⁶⁹ or its obverse—state withdrawal and erosion.⁷⁰ In contrast to this, I argue

⁶⁷ A tactic of state-fabrication refers to a procedure through which the state is fabricated within a certain logistics. Therefore, a tactic of state-fabrication is not reflective of specific intentionalities; rather it refers to an operational procedure that allow for the coming into being of certain regimes of state-fabrication and makes for certain morphings of the state.

⁶⁸ In seeing governmental tactics as a significant aspect of the mission mode of state-fabrication, this article broadly borrows from the use of these terms by de Certeau. De Certeau uses tactic as an aspect of acting in time that lies beyond the proper which is the location of strategy and strategic intentionalities. For details on de Certeau's discussions on tactics and strategy, please refer to M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1988).

⁶⁹ J. Ferguson, *The Anti-politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ L. Gordon and G. Whitty, 'Giving the "Hidden Hand" a Helping Hand? The Rhetoric and Reality of Neoliberal Education Reform in England and New Zealand', *Comparative Education* 33, no. 3 (1997): 453–67; T.K. Yun, 'Neoliberalism and the Decline of the Developmental State', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 29, no. 4 (1999): 441–61; S.K. Wegren, 'State Withdrawal and the Impact of Marketization on Rural Russia', *Policy Studies Journal* 28, no. 1 (2000): 46–67.

that we can see this as part of the processes involved in the multiplication of the nodes at which the state comes into contact with society.⁷¹ One of the ways in which this multiplication happens is by a process of penetration by dispersion of new kinds of institutions. The multiplication of nodes of contact between state and society has not necessarily translated into greater effectiveness in governmental practice. But it has involved the state seeping into the social, and becoming open to getting imbricated into multiple networks of actors and agents and their tactical usages.

Expansion of the Body of 'the State'

Apart from multiplication of the nodes for interactions between state and society, the mission mode of state-fabrication has also involved an increase in the number and types of institutions that fall under the ambit of what are commonly perceived as statist organisations and practices. Increasingly, NGOs that have been set up by the government and are more or less exclusively run on government funding or money routed via the government have become important players in the development sector. These have been generally studied as government-organised NGOs or GONGOs that are formed by states to get access to funds and expertise that are relatively inaccessible to governmental agencies and to venture out into unconventional areas of work.⁷² These are generally more prominent in relatively undemocratic countries.⁷³ But of late, these have started rapidly growing in number in democratic countries such as India as well. The growth of NGOs in India has been seen as a part of a broader shift towards neoliberal governmentality.⁷⁴

Projectisation of the government's work in the mission mode has involved using the organisational form of the NGOs by the state to extend itself on the ground. For example, village-level watershed development committees, or school development committees that are set under the aegis of the relevant state level and district-level missions, are generally registered as societies under the Societies Registration Act of 1860, and are technically NGOs. But this is not merely a matter of extension of the state into lower levels. Even at the level of the state government, the state-level watershed development missions or similar bodies in

⁷¹ This seems necessary as the same processes seem to be conceptualised radically differently in these two kinds of literature. By removing the focus from the substantive content of the state's actions to its forms, as I have tried to do, it seems possible to describe these processes more intelligibly.

⁷² J. Chen, 'The NGO Community in China', *China Perspectives* 68 (2006): 29–40.

⁷³ M. Mulligan, 'On the Trail of Malaysia's Weirdest Animal: The GONGO', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 96, no. 391 (2007): 429–34.

⁷⁴ A. Sharma, *Logics of Empowerment: Development, Gender, and Governance in Neoliberal India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and 'Crossbreeding Institutions, Breeding Struggle: Women's Empowerment, Neo-liberal Governmentality, and State (Re)formation in India', *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (2006): 60–95.

other missions are also registered societies. This means that the state is morphing by creating NGOs, and funnelling a large part of its activities through them. Thus, the very understanding of what constitutes a 'governmental' organisation is changing and expanding. Due to such a process, there has not only been an expansion of the type and number of institutions and the conceptual space of governmental institutions, but also the potential for the actual incidents and spaces in which people come into contact with and perceive the state.

This kind of an understanding can lead us to a more considered assessment of what is now conventionally understood as neoliberal governmentality in a post-colony such as India. An increasingly important body of work sees economic reforms and emergence of neoliberal governmentality in India as being instantiated through processes such as deregulation of markets, removals of subsidies and the retreat of the state. In this context, arguments have been made to understand the particularity of the Indian experience, and thus question the borrowings from the conceptualisations surrounding the growth of the neoliberal state in the West and its consequences.⁷⁵ Giving the example of a grassroots governmental women's empowerment programme that has a GONGO structure, Aradhana Sharma argue that the emergence of GONGOs in India has led to what she terms as the degovernmentalisation of the state and the multiplication of nodes of governance outside of formal structures.⁷⁶ This is an argument against simplistic accounts of state withdrawal in India due to the growth of neoliberal governmental practices. Similarly, Gupta and Sharma argue that the growth of neoliberal governmentality in India has not led to the supplanting of the logic of welfare by the logic of empowerment as in the West; rather, these two logics and their attendant operationalisation seem to have simultaneous propagation in India.⁷⁷ This sub-section has argued in a similar fashion to posit that we need more nuanced accounts of the processes that are imbricated in the emergence of neoliberal governmentality in India.

Provisionalisation

Along with multiplication and expansion, provisionalisation is another important tactic of state-fabrication in the mission mode. The idea of the state is generally sustained by a certain imperative to portray itself as a permanent entity that lies above society.⁷⁸ The state is seen as an agent of change, but not necessarily as a temporal artifact. Narratives surrounding the state in the post-colony have increasingly been told through the tropes of state failure or state

⁷⁵ A. Gupta and A. Sharma, 'Globalization and Postcolonial States', *Current Anthropology* 47, no. 2 (2006): 277–307.

⁷⁶ A. Sharma, 'Crossbreeding Institutions, Breeding Struggle'.

⁷⁷ A. Gupta, and A. Sharma, *ibid*, p. 277–307.

⁷⁸ J.S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

withdrawal.⁷⁹ What this sub-section argues is that due to the multiplication and expansion of the body of the state and the pluralisation of its governing logics, there has been a certain provisionalisation of the state as a material fact, although this may still not bring into question the abstract notion of the state as a permanent entity.

For example, in most small towns and cities in India, the state is made visible and available locally to people by its material body, primarily permanent offices. In most small cities and towns, government offices of various kinds, ranging from the post office to the police barracks, provide the landmarks around which people lay out a map of their everyday lives and experiences.⁸⁰ Since most of the missions operate in a time-bound fashion through projects, their offices are generally rented out and are not permanent. Similarly, the employees of the missions are generally hired on contract for the duration of the projects these missions operate. Thus, perceptual permanence that was an important characteristic of the ways in which the state operated and was perceived in India, no longer holds true as effectively as earlier.

Conclusion

This article has tried to challenge a few of the key assumptions behind the passive revolution formulation surrounding the state in India. This scholarship locates a significant morphing of state and politics in India during the period of decolonisation, that is, during the period from 1945 to 1952. This article has shown that at least equally momentous changes happened during the period 1977–91, a period that I have called the long 1980s. The emergence of the mission mode of state-fabrication is a significant aspect of the changes that have taken place during this period. This morphing of the state and the emergence of the mission mode of state-fabrication were located by this article within a broader process of morphings in the regimes involved in the functioning of the developmental state (from a regime of visibility to a regime of tactility) and the logistics of state-fabrication governing governmental tactics (from symbolic to quotidian logistics). By doing so, this article has tried to provide an account of three of the governmental tactics implicated in such morphings, and has taken the first step towards a new conceptual language for describing and understanding the changing forms of statecraft in India.

⁷⁹ Strange, S. 1998. *s.* Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press; J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; A. Saha and S. Mallavarapu, 'State Weakness and State Failure: Genesis and Consequences', *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 40 (2006): 4257–60; R.H. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁸⁰ A. Gupta, 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State', *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (1995): 375–402.