Rise of State in India

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201401071

This term paper aims to analyze the rise of State in India, through application of various theories concerning the development of State in the Indian context. The State plays the role of registering a political authority within a territory with its tasks delegated to functionaries [3, p. 11]. It keeps track of [3, p. 12-13] those under the State, who finance the States functioning - which includes collection of revenue, maintenance of law and order, manage territory. The timeline of the rise of State in India witnesses addition of these properties over time, dropping a few unsuccessful models and evolving into what it is today. The relics from two millennia ago are still evident in today's society, though not in peak strength, for example - the caste system.

The milestones in the evolution of State can be tracked by events in history. The first recorded instance of a State will be the Indus Valley Civilization, followed by the Aryan entry from Central Asia which established the caste system. Tribes or lineages in the country expanded into *janapadas* and *mahajanapadas*. The kingdom of Magadha emerged, which marks when the idea of a State shifted from "clan system to being engulfed by the despotic State" [3, p. 5]. What historians like to term "Oriental Despotism" continued till the British started gaining power.

R. Thapar argues [3, p.4] that "the State automatically came into existence once Aryans conquered the area", basing on the conquest theory of State. The theory of internal stratification and diversification can be applied to the birth of the caste system. The *Kshatriyas* were the ruling class and the others formed the peasantry [3, p. 4]. The Aryans were nomadic tribes who settled and had to form stratifications, whereupon internal conflicts arose. Other factors leading to State formation are population growth and social circumscription - "surplus can be produces only under coercion and population growth creates the need to produce and control surplus", asserts R. Thapar [3, p. 8]. The integrative model of State formation, where " factors conducive to conflicts are to be settled and controlled" [3, p. 8] looks at these factors - surplus and stratification as a process than as a specific event in history which triggered a spontaneous creation of State.

Any State, as evident from history tries to sustain itself. For this purpose structures and systems are constructed - which are sometimes administrative classes, societal divisions, despotic. The Aryan system was caste or *varna* based. The *Kshatriyas* took up the ruling and warfare and *Vaishyas* were primarily traders or peasants. *Brahmins* were in charge of the religious aspects. As an example of the State trying to sustain itself, the *Shudra* caste was created to accommodate certain misfits[3, p. 53] in then society - artisans, skilled labourers. Initially the classes were more of a division based on the work constituent

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population did, but slowly arose hierarchy in the system. *Shudras* continued to grow, with sub levels indicating touchable and untouchables. The Vedic society had the concept of private property, one primary measure of wealth being computed in heads of cattle with the cow having a special status[3, p. 25]. The ritualistic and religious aspects of the Vedic society fed to the population developing a sense of meaning in the society and helped in maintaining the structure. "The *varna* framework therefore was visualized as a structure for the integration of varying sub-systems rather than a mere reflection of the socio-economic hierarchy" [3, p. 54]. The *varna* system started off as what R. Thapar likes to term "lineage" systems. A lineage is defined as "a corporate group of unilineal kin with a formalized system of authority" [3, p. 10]. The *Mahajanapadas* had a theory of State which required seven elements or limbs - namely king, minister, city, domain/territory, treasury, army and ally [1, p. 37]. This theory, which can be traced back to second century AD is today known by the name *Manusmriti* [1, p. 37]. By the time the Mauryas set on to become the first major empire in the subcontinent, there were clear instructions on the delegation of the State's function, collection of revenue, maintaining law and order. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a detailed treatise on the State and politics and even has remarks on where the despotic king derives his power from, *i.e,* the legitimacy of the State.

The epics - *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana* along with other literature comes from the period where lineage systems were prevalent, joining to form *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas*, of which Hastinpur was a major one. The *Kurus* were a confederate of the Purus and Bharathas, while *Panchalas*, as the name suggests, is five clans joined together. The tensions between the two is what culminated as the war of *Kurukshetra*. The dice game in which *Pandavas* put their kingdom and other wealth at stake indicates that there were domain/territory and private ownership. Quite often, lineages appear in these epics. Take *devas* and *asuras* for example, both are described as descendants of *Prajapati*, indicating a lineage system. The *Pandavas* claim their legitimacy being born to the *devas*. Also indicative in the epics is the degree of independence is chieftain got and lack of delegation of tasks which were hindering the formation of the State as strong as we see it today.

The lineage State went into "arrested development" [3, p. 67] and didn't develop into a full State. There was just conciousness of identity and territory [3, p. 67]. The minimal delegation of authority led to the State being unable to finance it's functioning, even with increase in resources through acquire by the chieftains [3, p. 67] . The population growth and lack of resources led to migration from the western Ganga valley to the middle Ganga valley [3, p. 77], where the despotic State emerged. The later *gana sanghas* or tribal states comprised of single clan units like *Sakyas*, *Mallas* and *Koliyas* or confederacies like *Vrijji* dominated by the Licchavis. Monarchy was established first in Kosala and Magadha.

The period of transition from lineage system to despotic State can be used to explain how the environmental factors played a role in the development of the state which followed, as the middle Ganga valley was a new ecological situation for the settlers [3, p. 72]. The migration as described in *Satapata Brahmana* is due to the river Saraswati drying up, leaving people to move around looking for other places to settle. Barley and rice cultivation started in *Kosala*, present day north-eastern Uttar Pradesh and parts of Bihar [3, p. 73-74]. Only

one monsoons being available and single crop systems led to a necessity to "produce substantial excess at each harvest, to be stored and used during the fallow season" [3, p.74]. Irrigation requirements led to building *bandhas* and the system had to be maintained. The solutions which evolved proved the efficiency a centralized authority to deal with conflicts arising for the use of this shared resource over a decentralized one [3, p. 75]. And once land from the Ganga valley, labour from the increase in population and irrigation systems thanks to the new centralized authority was made available, the production of surplus was feasible and the social base of stratification intensified [3, p. 76]. R.S Sharma has a take on how iron influenced the process. The alluvial soil in the middle Ganga valley couldn't be ploughed with the usual wooden tools, and iron, which was already being used for woodcutting and other purposes [2, p. 68]. Paddy transplantation led to paddy giving better yield compared to wheat [2, p 68-69]. These factors paved way for surplus which could feed the diverse sections of society - priests, rulers, soldiers, merchants, artisans[2, p. 69]. The increased surplus and the advert of the use of iron led to urbanisation and claiming of large areas for arable land [2, p.98].

Although sliced up into different factors and explained, the rise of State in India is a phenomenon which happened over time, with a lot of variables. The ecological factors alone doesn't give a good picture. For example, migration could also be due to fission in the lineage systems rather than resources drying up and poor yield to sustain demographic. Also, places in the region with iron ores and prospect of mining it alone hasn't developed States, which implies the requirement of fertile land also being necessary. It's not just the broad explanation of conquest or societal stratification that leads to the formation of State, but an integrative model through competition [1, p. 8], as stated by Kulke. "An important characteristic of the traditional Indian State is that the sovereignty of the State was never monolithic but rather, 'layered and shared', more specifically [1, p. 8]. Other autonomous spheres or agents such as temples, religious sects, caste communities, markets and banking networks have prevailed during the rise of the State [1, p.8]. The expansion of the castes and sub-castes happened to accommodate the diversity and mixing of cultures following the migration, another example of the connections and integration through competition. The historical periods through which the State rose and where each period lacked or gained has been visited, and how the chaotic settlement warring against each other in separate clans transformed into a progressive, urbanised State with centralization of power and proper collection of revenue, administration, maintenance of law and order and through it stability to give rise to a State.

References

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