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# Democratic Struggles in the Adivasi Heartland<sup>1</sup>

## *Towards a Relational Conception of Subaltern Political Cultures and State-Society Relations in India*

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### TOWARDS A RELATIONAL CONCEPTION OF SUBALTERNITY<sup>2</sup>

For some time now, important new ground has been broken in the study of Indian state-society relations. Challenging an established body of work that tended to portray the Indian state as alien and irrelevant to the vernacular political cultures of the country's subaltern groups,<sup>3</sup> recent ethnographic explorations of 'subaltern politics'<sup>4</sup> and 'the everyday state'<sup>5</sup> have brought to the fore a far less Manichean

1. This chapter draws extensively on empirical material that has been presented previously in Nilsen, 2012 and 2013.
2. In this chapter, I use the terms 'subaltern' and 'subalternity' as they were intended by Gramsci – not as a 'code word' for 'working class', but as designations of 'an intersectionality of the variations of race, class, gender, culture, religion, nationalism, and colonialism functioning within an ensemble of socio-political and economic relations', Green, 2011: 400.
3. I have in mind here the kind of conceptualizations found in Ranajit Guha, 'Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography', in *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on Indian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha, Delhi: Oxford University Press; Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010; Ronald Inden, 'Embodying God: From Imperial Progresses to National Progresses in India', *Economy and Society*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1995, pp. 245–78; Ashis Nandy, 'The Political Culture of the Indian State', *Daedalus* 118, no. 4, pp. 1–26, and Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
4. Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999.
5. J. Fuller and John Harriss, 'For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State', in *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. C.J. Fuller and V. Béneí, London: Hurst and Company, 2001.

conception of political life in India. The work of scholars such as Heller (1999),<sup>6</sup> Jaffrelot (2003),<sup>7</sup> Fuller and Harriss (2001),<sup>8</sup> Corbridge et al. (2005),<sup>9</sup> Sharma (2008),<sup>10</sup> Gupta (2013),<sup>11</sup> Shah (2010),<sup>12</sup> Michelutti (2007),<sup>13</sup> Chatterjee (2004),<sup>14</sup> and Corbridge and Harriss (2000)<sup>15</sup> has shown how exploited and oppressed groups utilize the state in a myriad of ways, ranging from quotidian manipulations of the local state to the seizure of state power through participation in electoral politics, to challenge their adverse incorporation in the structures of power that undergird the political economy of contemporary India.

In a recent contribution to this body of scholarship, Williams, Vira and Chopra (2011) have argued that the current conjuncture is one in which the spaces for interaction between the Indian state and the most marginalized sections of its citizenry are proliferating and expanding.<sup>16</sup> They argue that the Indian polity is currently witnessing the proliferation of interstitial spaces in which ‘the fluid and contingent boundary between the state and society gets creatively renegotiated’.<sup>17</sup> And this in turn calls for analytical attention to be paid to ‘the ways in which marginality is reworked through active subaltern agency, in some cases through processes of everyday resistance, but also by exploiting spaces of opportunity which utilize state structures to further social ends’.<sup>18</sup> According to

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6. Patrick Heller, *The Labor of Development: Workers and the Transformation of Capitalism in Kerala, India*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
  7. Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*, London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003.
  8. C.J. Fuller and J. Harriss, op. cit.
  9. Stuart Corbridge, Glyn Williams, Manoj Srivastava, and Rene Véron, *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
  10. Aradhana Sharma, *The Logics of Empowerment: Development, Gender and Governance in Neoliberal India*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
  11. Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
  12. Alpa Shah, *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
  13. Lucia Michelutti, ‘The Vernacularization of Democracy: Political Participation and Popular Politics in North India’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2007, pp. 639–56.
  14. Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
  15. Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India*, op. cit.
  16. Philippa Williams, Bhaskar Vira and Deepta Chopra, ‘Marginality, Agency and Power: Experiencing the State in Contemporary India’, in *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2011, pp. 7–24.
  17. Vira, Williams and Chopra, ‘Marginality, Agency and Power’, p. 14.
  18. Ibid.

Williams, Vira and Chopra, this is a task best undertaken through the utilization of a Foucauldian conception of state power, in which the state is not conceived as 'a unitary centre of power', but in terms of 'multiple and contradictory articulations of power that emanate from no fixed axis'.<sup>19</sup> These 'power geometries'<sup>20</sup> are analytically virtuous in that they bring us far closer to a grounded understanding of the complex vicissitudes of a subaltern agency as it actually exists – that is, within what Moore has called 'relational spaces of connection and articulation'.<sup>21</sup>

However, as I have argued at length elsewhere,<sup>22</sup> this theoretical optic suffers from a tendency to elide the fact that the 'conjunctural opportunities' for subaltern empowerment to be advanced through the institutions, discourses and technologies of rule of the state, what Williams, Vira and Chopra refer to as 'spaces of opportunity' for the exercise of subaltern agency,<sup>23</sup> are part and parcel of a composite dialectical equation that also encompasses 'structural constraints' on the extent to which the state can serve as a conduit for collective oppositional projects from below.<sup>24</sup> An exclusive focus on the decentred nature of power in general, and state power in particular, is analytically detrimental in the sense that it cannot account for how and why, at specific and contingent conjunctures, the exercise of state power achieves a certain unity across dispersed sites, and the limits that this may impose upon the prospects for advancing subaltern agency in relation to the state.<sup>25</sup> The conceptual challenge before us, then, is that of developing a relational conception of subalternity that allows us to grasp the complex ways in which state power at some points comes to function in such a way as to conjoin dispersed sites of power and thus bring a certain degree of uniformity to the workings of the multiplicity of institutions that make up the 'state system'.<sup>26</sup>

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19. Ibid., p. 17. In addition to Foucault, common theoretical denominators in this body of work are Philip Abrams and Timothy Mitchell; for an extended discussion, see Alf Gunvald Nilsen, "Not Suspended in Mid-Air": Critical Reflections on Subaltern Encounters with the Indian State', in *Social Movements in the Global South: Dispossession, Development and Resistance*, ed. Sara M. Motta and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

20. Vira Williams and Chopra, op. cit., p. 17.

21. Donald S. Moore, 'Subaltern Struggles and the Politics of Place: Remapping Resistance in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands', in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1998, pp. 1–38.

22. Nilsen, 'Not Suspended in Mid-Air', op. cit.

23. Vira, Williams and Chopra, op. cit., p. 16.

24. Bob Jessop, *The Capitalist State: Marxist Theories and Methods*, Oxford: Martin Robertson, op. cit., p. 253.

If we are to address the challenge of developing an adequate relational conception of subalternity, our starting point should be the constitution and contested reproduction of historical relationships. Subalternity, that is, should thus be understood as being constituted in and through relations that emerge between social groups that are differentially positioned and endowed in terms of ‘the extent of their control of social relations and . . . the scope of their transformative powers’.<sup>27</sup> These historical relations are in turn dynamic: they transform as a consequence of contestation between dominant and subaltern groups in ‘a societal field-of-force’<sup>28</sup> and there are two aspects of this dynamic relation are of particular importance here.

First of all, the exercise of hegemony by a dominant social group is not something that is simply accomplished, once and for all. Rather, constituting, reproducing and extending hegemony entails contentious negotiations in and through which ‘the dominant group is coordinated with the general interests of the subordinate groups . . . [in] a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria . . . between the fundamental group and those of their subordinate groups . . .’.<sup>29</sup> Dominant groups, in short, are dependent on gaining the consent of subaltern groups. Achieving this will entail the making of concessions by the for-

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25. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 94 and *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–7*, London: Pantheon, p. 142. See Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, pp. 234–5 and *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, pp. 151–3 for some very insightful comments on how Foucault struggled to resolve this issue in his later writings. In the recent ethnographic work on the Indian state, there is a tendency to acknowledge that there may be limits to the extent to which subaltern groups can appropriate the state to advance their interests, needs and aspirations, often with reference to empirical cases that suggest that this is so (see for example the references to state violence against organized protest against displacement, the military offensive in the ‘Red Corridor’, inaction in relation to the Bhopal gas tragedy and so on in Vira, Williams and Chopra, ‘Marginality, Agency and Power’, p. 13, and the reference to Kashmir, the Punjab and the Narmada Valley in Corbridge et al., *Seeing the State*, p. 18). However, what is missing is a substantial interrogation of why exactly such limits exist and the political ramifications they carry for subaltern agency.

26. Philip Abrams, ‘Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State’, in *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1988, pp. 58–89, see p. 82.

27. William H. Sewell, ‘A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation’, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 98, no. 1, 1992, p. 20.

28. E.P. Thompson, ‘Eighteenth Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class’, *Social History*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1978, p. 50.

29. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998, pp. 181–2.

mer to the latter, albeit without undermining the structural foundations that ultimately buttress hegemony.<sup>30</sup>

Second, it is crucial that we recognize that the 'local rationalities'<sup>31</sup> that subaltern groups develop in order to ameliorate or oppose their adverse incorporation into unequal power relations, and in extension of this, oppositional projects in the form of social movements, should not be thought of or construed as wholly 'autonomous expressions of a subaltern politics and culture'.<sup>32</sup> To the contrary, the local rationalities of subaltern groups have been moulded in and through learning processes that advance as and when these groups encounter and contest the hegemonic projects of dominant groups and the institutional complexes and discursive formations in which this hegemony is entrenched.<sup>33</sup>

Now, Gramsci of course thought of the state as an institutional modality that was crucial in terms of enabling dominant groups to achieve 'the fundamental historical unity'<sup>34</sup> that makes it possible for these groups to articulate and gain consent for hegemonic projects. It is therefore necessary to make two basic points that relate the above argument about subalternity to a specific understanding of 'the political power that is pre-eminently ascribed to the state'.<sup>35</sup>

First, state power should be conceived of as 'a complex social relation that reflects the changing balance of social forces in a determinate conjuncture',<sup>36</sup> manifest, of course, in an ensemble of institutions that these social forces act in and through. The key analytical virtue of such a reading is that the state and the power vested in it cannot be reduced to 'a fixed sum of resources which can be appropriated by one social force to the exclusion of others',<sup>37</sup> the state, in other words, cannot be construed simply as a monolithic vehicle for the execution of the designs of dominant groups.

Second, and as a counterpoint, an appreciation of the fact that there is a degree of plasticity in the constitution and workings of state power should not lead us to neglect the fact that the state 'can never be equally accessible to all forces and

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30. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; Alf Gungvald Nilsen, 'The Authors and the Actors of Their Own Drama: Towards a Marxist Theory of Social Movements', *Capital and Class*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2009, pp. 109–39.

31. Laurence Cox, *Building Counter Culture: The Radical Praxis of Social Movement Milieux*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dublin: Trinity College; Nilsen, 'The Authors and the Actors'.

32. Roseberry, 'Hegemony and the Languages of Contention', p. 360.

33. Nilsen, 'Autonome Domener'; 'The Authors and the Actors'.

34. Gramsci, op. cit., p. 52.

35. Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, London: Verso Books, p. 147.

36. Jessop, *The Capitalist State*, p. 221.

37. Jessop, op.cit., p. 225.

equally available for all purposes'.<sup>38</sup> A given state emerges from and is entwined in a historically determinate latticework of social processes and power relations. Its working will also buttress the reproduction of this social formation as a structured whole. Following Bob Jessop's work, the structural constraints that flow from this can be conceptualized in terms of a 'strategic selectivity' that renders the state 'more accessible to some forces than others according to the strategies they adopt to gain power', and 'because of the modes of intervention and resources which characterize the system'.<sup>39</sup>

In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with how subaltern groups encounter both enablements and constraints as they engage with and appropriate the 'universalizing vocabularies' of democratic rights, citizenship, and constitutional entitlements espoused by the modern Indian state.<sup>40</sup> Such vocabularies are of course central to the hegemonic projects that animate state formation, but they also tend to become 'sites of protracted social struggle as to what they mean and for whom' as subaltern groups initiate and pursue emancipatory struggles.<sup>41</sup>

In what follows, I shall discuss these questions in relation to grassroots resistance by Adivasis to the 'everyday tyranny' of the local state in western Madhya Pradesh.<sup>42</sup> As Ramachandra Guha has noted, Adivasis are, as a whole and broadly speaking, the people that 'have gained least and lost most from six decades of democracy and development in India'.<sup>43</sup> This is also true of the Bhil, Bhilala, and Barela communities of western Madhya Pradesh. The districts in which they constitute the dominant part of the population – Jhabua, Alirajpur, Khargone, and Badwani – figure in the lowest rungs of the Madhya Pradesh Human Development Index, with Jhabua and Badwani as the two bottom-most districts.<sup>44</sup>

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38. Jessop, *State Theory*, p. 250.

39. Jessop, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

40. P. Corrigan and D. Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, p. 7.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Alf Gunvald Nilsen, *Dispossession and Resistance in India: The River and the Rage*, London: Routledge, 2010.

42. Ramachandra Guha, 'Adivasis: Unacknowledged Victims', *Outlook*, 14 April 2010, p. 1.

43. Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report, Bhopal: Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2007. In 2007, when this report was published, Alirajpur was still a tehsil in Jhabua district.

44. I base this account on a series of interviews with AMS activists carried out in 2009 and 2010. In order to reconstruct the detail and sequence of events in the repression of the AMS, I have also drawn extensively on Amita Baviskar's (2001) rich and dense account, which in turn is based on her intervention as a human rights activist during the events of 1997–8. In addition, I also draw on AMS (1998) and Amnesty International (2000), as well as Baviskar's (1995) analysis of the KMCS. See Nilsen (2010) for an extended account of everyday tyranny.

The impact of rampant poverty and exploitation on Adivasi communities has been compounded by political disenfranchisement. Until recently, making a rights-based claim on the state was unthinkable for most Adivasis in this region; the state and its officials were dangerous figures that one avoided or appeased, and under no circumstance challenged. In the following sections, I will show how Adivasis have sought to challenge this aspect of their subordination through collective oppositional projects centred on the making of rights-based claims. Furthermore, I will also delineate how these democratic struggles have encountered their limits when their momentum has become such as to threaten regional elites and their hold on the state. In the concluding remarks, I briefly discuss the strategic implications of these experiences.

## DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLES IN THE ADIVASI HEARTLAND

### THE ANATOMY OF EVERYDAY TYRANNY<sup>45</sup>

‘We learned how to speak’ – this is how activists of the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath (KMCS), an independent trade union working in Bhil and Bhilala communities in the southern part of what is now Alirajpur district in western Madhya Pradesh, would often explain how the process of mobilization that they had participated in had affected their lives. As will become clear, they had learned how to speak a democratic vernacular that asserted basic constitutional rights and entitlements against the workings of a profoundly oppressive local state.

When Adivasis in western Madhya Pradesh encountered ‘the everyday state’,<sup>46</sup> they did not come into touch with an agency or with officials who provided services to citizens, and were accountable and attuned to their rights and demands.<sup>47</sup> Rather, what they encountered was an ‘everyday tyranny’<sup>48</sup> in the form of state officials – forest guards, police constables, revenue officials – whose regime was cruel and coercive: they would levy extortionate exactions on people who were in effect rightless subjects.

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45. C.J. Fuller and J. Harriss, *op. cit.*

46. The experience of encountering the state would be different for a small elite among the Adivasis, namely the Patels (the village headmen) and the Patwaris (the revenue officers). These men were normally the nodes that linked the local state to the villages, and they often partook in the coercion and extortion that state officials imposed on the village communities (field notes and interviews, 2009–10; see also Baviskar, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 11).

47. Alf Gunvald Nilsen, *op. cit.*, 2010.

48. Ratan, interview, March 2003.

One KMCS activist recounted how officials of the state were a persistent source of fear for the villagers. The officials working for the forest department and the revenue department, as well as the local police, harassed and extorted the villagers very badly. The fear of the officials was such that, if two brothers were caught working on a field in the forest, one of them would do the ploughing, and the other would stand guard to look out for the forest rangers. If they were caught ploughing their field, they risked being beaten up, or having their hand nailed to the trunk of a tree. Invariably, villagers who were caught cultivating their plots in the forest would be taken to the local police station. A savage beating would follow, and a case would be filed against them for encroaching on reserved forests. This would in turn be used as a means to extort money from the villagers: a handsome bribe would make the charges disappear. If officials ran into a villager on the road, they would often demand that he or she carry their bags for them. If this was refused – and even if people failed to greet the officials politely – they would be given a heavy bashing.<sup>49</sup>

This is only one of many accounts of the violence, coercion and extortion meted out by state officials that I came across during the course of my research among activists from the Bhil communities in Alirajpur district. In another case, villagers told me how, if they were caught walking along the road carrying a sickle, they would be accused of going to collect fodder from the forest and beaten up; the officials would invariably demand money from them if they wanted to avoid criminal charges. Similarly, if people were caught with an axe, or if they were carrying firewood, they would risk beatings and extortion. If someone needed to cut down trees to get building materials for a house, the forest guards demanded a bribe of up to Rs. 2,500, chickens and homemade liquor.

Forest and forest resources were so central to the working of everyday tyranny because of the fact that Adivasi livelihoods contravened the formal laws of the land.<sup>50</sup> Among the Bhils and Bhilalas in western Madhya Pradesh, the practice of clearing and cultivating plots of land in the forest, a practice known as *nevad*, is an essential part of their lifestyle. The yields from these plots complement that from the revenue land that borders the village huts. The forest also provides livestock fodder, firewood and building materials, and various forms of minor forest produce that can be sold in the *haat* (market) in nearby towns. However, these

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49. This is not to say that breach of forest law was the only source of state tyranny in the region. See Nilsen (2010) for a more detailed account of the manifold ways in which the local state imposed its regime of extortion on the Alirajpur communities.

50. M. Gadgil and R. Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

livelihood practices are illegal: As M. Gadgil and R. Guha point out, Indian forest legislation has entrenched 'the right of the state to exclusive control over forest protection, production and management'. This legislation originated in the commodification of India's forests during the British colonial rule. In order to secure the supply of timber for shipbuilding and railway expansion, the colonial state passed a series of laws, culminating in the Indian Forest Acts of 1878 and 1927, which established 'the absolute proprietary right of the state' to India's forests, and thus, abrogated 'by one stroke of the executive pen ... centuries of customary use by rural populations all over India'.<sup>51</sup>

State ownership of forests, a phenomenon that carried over into the postcolonial era, was a key moment in the historical process through which Adivasi communities in western India came to be subordinated by centralized state power: the political economy of shared sovereignty in which Bhil forest polities had claimed a stake in the Maratha period disintegrated, and in the process 'the kings of the forest and their subjects alike became the largely acquiescent serfs of the Forest Department'.<sup>52</sup> The everyday ramifications of this was that clearing and cultivating fields in the forest, as well as other customary uses of forest resources were defined as 'encroachments' on state property.<sup>53</sup> Adivasi livelihoods were thus criminalized, and this in turn undergirds everyday tyranny as a state-society relation in western Madhya Pradesh, as it provided a pretext for forest guards and other officials to extort bribes from the Bhil communities.

In Alirajpur, the giving and taking of bribes had become so central to the workings of everyday life in Bhil communities that it was in fact a guiding principle of how relations and interactions between Adivasis and the state were supposed to be structured. Indeed, the local rationality bred by everyday tyranny was one in which the fear of violent reprisal ruled out defiance and opposition to the state and its officials. Whatever kind of resentment may have bubbled beneath the surface, a 'public transcript'<sup>54</sup> of deference and appeasement was adopted as a survival strategy in the hills of Alirajpur.<sup>55</sup>

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51. Ibid., p. 134.

52. S. Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India (1200–1991)*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 167; A. Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

53. A. Prasad, *Environmentalism and the Left: Contemporary Debates and Future Agendas in Tribal Areas*, New Delhi: Leftword, 2004.

54. J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

## CHALLENGING EVERYDAY TYRANNY<sup>56</sup>

In the early 1980s, everyday tyranny and the relations of power upon which it rested came in for a challenge when two ‘middle class activists’,<sup>57</sup> Khemraj and Amit, who were intent on mobilizing the Bhils, arrived in Alirajpur. Khemraj, a first-generation literate from a family of poor Jat farmers in southern Rajasthan and a former student activist, was the first of the two to reach Alirajpur. There he established a friendship with Khemla, a young Bhil Adivasi who had been educated at a residential school in the market village Umrli. Khemla was the son of an activist of a socialist movement that had been active in the region during the 1960s,<sup>58</sup> and had acquired a reputation for being rebellious and ready to take effective action against misbehaving state officials. Khemla was a natural ally for Khemraj, who settled with him and his family in the village of Badi Vaigalgaon.

Khemla and Khemraj first confronted the everyday tyranny of the state when they came to know that close to Khemla’s village, the irrigation department was having a pond constructed. They signed on to work on the project, and soon discovered that the contractor – a non-Adivasi *sahukar* (moneylender) from Alirajpur town – was not paying the workers the government-stipulated minimum wage. Khemla and Khemraj explained to their fellow workers that this was the case and calculated for them what they would be earning if the contractor paid them the minimum wage. If they made a collective demand to the contractor, they said, he would have no choice but to pay the minimum wage. Under the leadership of Khemla and Khemraj, the workers went on strike and demanded that they be paid the wages that were due to them. The contractor responded by having his goons

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55. This should not be read as an argument to the effect that a lack of capacity for and propensity towards resistance has been a constant feature of Adivasi relations to external social groups and forces. Rather, the history of Bhil and Bhilala Adivasis in western India ‘has been a chronicle of incorporation and resistance’. (Baviskar 1995: 85) from the nineteenth century onwards (see Hardiman 1987 and Skaria 1999). Immediately after Independence in 1947, the region witnessed the rise of the Lal Topi Andolan under socialist leadership. The Lal Topi Andolan made substantial headway in challenging the oppression of Adivasis by users and championing the rights of Adivasis to forest resources. However, the movement was brutally repressed in the 1960s, and the living memory of this repression seems to have acted as a barrier for open defiance and resistance to the state (Nilsen 2010).

56. This section is based on interviews with KMCS activists carried out in 2003 and 2009–10. I have also drawn on Baviskar (1995) and Banerjee (n.d.).

57. This is the common term used to describe activists who come from an urban background, who tend to be highly educated and who have grown up in families engaged in white-collar work. The following account of the KMCS is based on interviews carried out in 2003 and 2009–10, as well as Baviskar (1995, chap. 8) and Banerjee (n.d., chaps. 3 and 4).

58. This was the Lal Topi Andolan. See footnote xlviii.

beat up Khemla, but this did not deter the strikers. Ultimately, the Subdivisional Magistrate intervened and settled the matter in favour of the striking workers.

The news of the successful confrontation spread like wildfire in the area, and served the 'dual function of informing and mobilizing at the same time'.<sup>59</sup> Calls came from nearby villages, who asked the activists to come and stay, and help them with their problems. At this point, Khemla and Khemraj had been joined by Amit, a middle class activist who had left his studies at the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi. The three travelled from village to village, where people would share with them their experiences of the everyday tyranny of the local state and its officials. And through this process, a foundation was established for collective mobilization.

When news reached Khemraj that several people from the village of Gondwani had been picked up by forest guards and taken to the Range Office in the neighbouring village of Attha, a crucial chain of events was set in motion. Along with some of the villagers, Khemraj went to the Forest Department bungalow to intervene. When he approached the forest guards, Khemraj was invited inside the bungalow. But as soon as they had shut the doors behind him, they proceeded to beat him to pulp; using lit *bidis* (country-made cigarettes) they burned his arms. Feeling satisfied that they had taught the haughty activist a lesson, they released Khemraj to his companions outside the bungalow. While Khemraj was taken to hospital, Amit and Khemla organized a march to Alirajpur in order to stage a dharna in front of the *tehsil* office. A complaint was submitted to the police, press notes were circulated, and the incident soon became news. The Chief Minister (CM) – Arjun Singh of the Congress party – felt compelled to intervene, and as a result, several of the forest guards involved in beating up Khemraj were suspended. Digvijay Singh, who at this point was state president of the Congress party and the CM ordered the highest-ranking official of the Forest Department to Mathvad, a small town not far from Alirajpur, to consult with people from the communities. In the meeting, the villagers detailed the misbehaviour of the forest guard. In response, the Conservator implored the villagers to file complaints if such incidents took place again.

In the wake of these confrontations and the concessions exacted from the state, mobilization expanded throughout the southern part of Alirajpur; at its height, it extended to approximately 100 villages. Ultimately, a formal organization was established and registered as an independent trade union under the name Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath (KMCS). Based in the village of Attha, the KMCS

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59. R. Guha, 2002, 'Adivasis, Naxalites and Indian Democracy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 42, no. 32, 11–17 August 2007, pp. 3305–12.

developed its activities from challenging the brutality and exactions of petty state officials to implementing anti-corruption campaigns, constructive work in health, education and agriculture, participation in local politics and, perhaps most significantly, a protracted struggle for the recognition of Adivasi forest rights.

It was quite natural for the activists to focus their mobilization on the issue of forest rights. Of all the state agencies that preyed on the Adivasi communities, it was the Forest Department that was responsible for the worst depredations,

People were under this impression that their whole lives were bound by the forest guards: 'if we do anything, we are breaking the law'. . . . And the forest issue was not just asking for land, *hain na*, or complaining against the beating by forest guard. It was a whole idea, instilling an idea in the minds of the people that 'whose forest is this; did we come here first or did the Forest Department come here first?' . . . So basically we were trying to say that this is our forest and we have to look after it, and we have to decide the rules and laws for its use.<sup>60</sup>

Following persistent pressure from the Sangath, the Forest Department conducted a survey of *nevad* cultivation in the block of Mathvad in 1988. The survey revealed that all cultivators in the surveyed area had several small plots of *nevad* in addition to their legal holdings. However, the survey did not lead to any concerted measures by the authorities to recognize *nevad* lands as the lawful property of the Bhil cultivators. Thus, the struggle for forest rights carried on, at times escalating into violent confrontations. In the early 1990s, for example, protests against the digging of Cattle Proof Trenches (CPTs) that would block access to the forests for several villages actively involved with the Sangath, was met with police firing.

Ultimately, in 1994, the Government of Madhya Pradesh announced that land that had been encroached prior to 1980 would be recognized. This was announced in response to stipulations from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and was in large part a move geared towards appeasing the KMCS. The measure was met with enthusiasm in the Sondwa block of Alirajpur *tehsil*.<sup>61</sup> However, the results were actually not very substantial. Considerable odds were stacked against the claimants from the start as the Ministry of Environment and Forests laid down stringent conditions for recognizing encroachments in state-owned forests. Furthermore, evidence had to be submitted that the lands in question had actually

60. Amit Bhatnagar, interview, August 2009.

61. A. Baviskar, 'Fate of the Forest: Conservation and Tribal Rights', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 29, no. 38, 1994, pp. 2493–501.

been tilled before 1980. More often than not, this evidence consisted of receipts given by forest guards for fines paid for the so-called 'forest-crimes'. But such receipts often did not exist: 'Most people . . . were never given receipts because the fines that they paid went directly into the pockets of the forest guards, *nakedars* and deputy rangers. When receipts were given in exceptional cases, very often they were small bits of paper that were easily lost or destroyed.'<sup>62</sup>

Eventually, a kind of *modus vivendi* was reached between the KMCS and the villages mobilized by it on the one hand, and the state authorities and the Forest Department on the other: the Forest Department allowed *nevad* to proceed in villages that were recognized as Sangath strongholds. Thus, despite the fact that the state did not formally recognize *nevad*, the KMCS nevertheless succeeded in carving out a space for this livelihood practice.

What these processes of contention ultimately achieved was to fundamentally alter the way in which subaltern groups in Alirajpur conceived of and related to the state. The state officials who at one time had been perceived as all-powerful figures by the Bhil and Bhilala Adivasis of the region were now seen as public servants whose powers were legally circumscribed and who were accountable to the local citizenry; a state apparatus that had previously been known only for its forceful exaction of bribes, came to be understood as an institution that was meant to provide services and safeguard rights, an institution upon which rightful claims and demands could be made, and an institution which local people could participate in the running of. It was, then, a process through which formerly subjugated communities emerged as agents who could and would 'seek to engage with the state as citizens, or as members of populations with legally defined or politically inspired expectations' in a competent and assertive way.<sup>63</sup>

Through this process, local rationalities were transformed. In activist accounts of what lessons had been learned from participating in the KMCS, three themes were particularly important: first, that of losing their fear of the officials; second, that of learning that officials were not entitled to extort them; and third, that of acquiring the skills that allowed them to challenge everyday tyranny. In sum, the transformation of local rationalities revolved around effecting changes in emotional dispositions, cognitive resources and practical skills. A central aspect of this transformation was the fact that the Sangath created a democratic vernacular where before there was none. It was precisely through an appropriation of the 'universalizing vocabularies' of the Indian state, notably, vocabularies of democracy and development, that the KMCS was able to orchestrate this change. Crucially, this vocabulary was infused

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62. Ibid., p. 2493.

63. Corbridge et al., op. cit., p. 13.

with forms of meaning, above all centred on the legitimacy of customary use rights, that reflect subaltern experiences of oppression and hopes for change. By deploying such vocabulary to reveal the ‘radical disjuncture between ritual language and social action’<sup>64</sup> in the workings of the state in Alirajpur, the KMCS democratized local state-society relationships in Alirajpur to a significant extent.

Whereas this is an example of how processes of collective action can alter the balance of power between dominant and subaltern groups in a historically determinate field of force, it is also necessary to take cognizance of the limits to such processes of empowerment.

### QUELLING SUBALTERN RESISTANCE<sup>65</sup>

The politics of the KMCS set out to democratize the local state, which is an entity that is suffused with local power relations, and which in turn plays a major part in sustaining and reproducing these power relations.<sup>66</sup> As C. Jeffrey and J. Lerche have shown, regional elites in India have colonized the local state apparatus through extensive networks of contact and influence. Combined with their substantial purchasing power in the informal market for government jobs, the state system serves as an important modality in the reproduction of class advantage. And crucially, challenges to elite hegemony tend to provoke ‘reactionary upper caste violence and intimidation’.<sup>67</sup> It is this latter aspect of local state-society relations – the repressive response of dominant groups to democratic challenges from below – that constitutes the focus of attention in the remainder of the chapter.<sup>68</sup>

Khargone district is located just to the south of Alirajpur, and like Alirajpur, it is an Adivasi-dominated district.<sup>69</sup> Here, during the early 1990s, two middle-class activists, with a background from the Communist Party of India, propelled the for-

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64. D. Nugent, *Modernity at the Edge of Empire: State, Individual and Nation in the Northern Peruvian Andes 1885–1935*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 20.

65. I base this account of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan on interviews with AMS activists carried out in 2009–10, Baviskar (2001), Amnesty International (n.d.), and Adivasi Mukti Sangathan (1997).

66. See B. Harriss-White, *India Working: Essays on Society and Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, C. Jeffrey and J. Lerche, ‘Stating the Difference: State, Discourse and Class Reproduction in Uttar Pradesh, India’, *Development and Change*, no. 31, 2000, pp. 857–78.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 873.

68. N. Sundar, ‘Vigilantism, Culpability and Moral Dilemmas’, *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, pp. 113–21.

69. Khargone was divided into Badwani and Khargone districts in 1998.

mation of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan (AMS) through a process that shared many similarities with the emergence of the KMCS.

Bijoy Panda, a founding member of the AMS, described the situation of Adivasis in Sendwaha *tehsil* as follows: 'they were exploited, suppressed, brutally killed. And even if they were cheated, and all these things . . . they were not able to open their voice. They were really voiceless. So our initial strategy was to create a situation where people can have their own voice before anything'.<sup>70</sup>

A leading Adivasi activist from Warla block elucidated the relationship between the Adivasi communities and the Forest Department as follows:

The jungle and the Adivasi cannot exist without the other. Without the jungles, the Adivasi cannot survive. We have to pay money if we want to take our cattle for grazing. They would beat up women who go to get wood from the jungles to cook food. One had to give money for the wood also. And if any of our farming tools broke, like a plough, etc., then also we had to give money. If because of the rain or the wind, our houses get damaged and we need to repair them, we still needed to give money. One log of wood would cost Rs. 1,000. So if you use two or three logs to repair your house, you generally have to pay at least Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 5,000. If a person refused to pay, the forest guards would beat him up and make false cases in his name. They had many ways.

'The forest guards', he added, 'treated the people's property – their hens and their goats and so on – as their own'. In the villages, he argued, people knew very little of their rights in relation to the state,

Nobody knew anything. They didn't know a thing about rights. The people thought it was all right to get robbed. If the forest guards beat us up, the people said they had a right to do so. If the policemen would forcefully enter someone's house and catch them with 2–5 litres of alcohol, the people still said it's their right to do so. Nobody knew anything about rights.<sup>71</sup>

The same forms of everyday tyranny that were so prominent in Alirajpur, defined state-society relations in Khargone.

The AMS made a great deal of headway in challenging the local elites and their hold on the state in its first years of activity. In the process, a sense of self-confidence and a capacity for assertion was generated in the local Adivasi communi-

70. Bijoy Panda, personal interview, November 2009.

71. Mukesh, personal interview, November 2009.

ties. The mid-1990s, however, would witness the convergence of two developments that set in train a process of violent repression against the organization.

During the first five years of its existence, the AMS rapidly extended its reach across Khargone district: by 1996, it had a presence in more than 500 villages in three blocks of the district, and had linked its activities to several other Adivasi organizations in the area. Consequently, the AMS was also capable of challenging the illegal trade in timber and liquor that was going on in the Adivasi villages. In Bhagwanpura block, some 250 liquor outlets were closed as a result of campaigning by the AMS, which dealt a significant blow to the incomes of a powerful group of vendors, as well as to local police and Adivasi *dalals*. One person whose interests were particularly hurt was Jhagdia Patel, the president of the Bhagwanpura Congress Committee and the hereditary headman of Kabri village, who had profited from illegal trading for a long time. In much the same way, the timber mafia found itself challenged when the AMS stopped a truck that was ferrying illegally felled timber, and reported the case to the police and the media. Local politicians were naturally in a rage, as their coffers had until then been filled with bribes from the timber mafia.

Adding to the concerns of the local elites was the fact that the oppositional project of the AMS was radicalized during the mid-1990s, as the organization took up village self-rule as a key demand. This development, in turn, was a response to what was perceived to be the limitations of the previous gains that the organization had made:

We liberated them, the communities, from the oppression of the local officials, traders, and dominant classes there, but we were not successful to challenge the government policies, in order to control the natural resources. . . . It started in the nineties, in the early nineties, when people . . . thought we should take control over this forest, land, water because even though we are free from this local exploitative system, but we still get these eviction notices.<sup>72</sup>

The AMS thus linked its activities to the Bharat Jan Andolan, a national network of social movements that was led by the one-time Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Dr B.D. Sharma, which at this point in time was campaigning for the implementation of the Bhuriya Committee Report. The report, which had been submitted to the Government of India in 1995, had recommended that tribal self-rule should be implemented in Scheduled Areas. In

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72. Nikunj Bhatia, personal interview, April 2010.

response, the central government enacted the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996.

This Act put a potentially effective weapon in the hands of the activists of the AMS, who by this time had managed to gather more than 100,000 people for a national rally championing Adivasi self-rule in the district headquarters of Khar-gone. The gains that the organization had made at local level, gains that undermined the power base of local Adivasi *netas* (leaders) with Congress affiliations, such as Jhagdia Patel, could therefore be extended, and this made the regional political elites sit up and take notice.

One person who was particularly concerned was Subhash Yadav, the Deputy Chief Minister of Digvijay Singh's Congress government, and MLA from the constituency of Kasarwad in Khargone district. Aiming to quell the advance of the AMS, he entered into an alliance with Jhagdia Patel. Together, they orchestrated the formation of the Adivasi Samaj Sudhar Shanti Sena (ASSSS) in 1996 in order to counter the further rise of the AMS by instigating a series of violent conflicts. An unprecedented campaign of terror and repression would soon follow.

The conflict kicked off in 1996, when the AMS declared that during the Indal festival, the most important annual festival of the Adivasis in the region, liquor would not be sold in Kabri village. As retaliation, Jhagdia Patel and his men abducted one of the anti-liquor activists and tortured him: they broke one of his legs and one of his arms, and then proceeded to urinate in his mouth when he asked for a drink of water.

A few days later, Rem Singh, sarpanch (elected head) of Kabri and the leader of the anti-liquor campaign in the village, was called to the local police station to negotiate the dispute with Jhagdia Patel. This, however, turned out to be a trap: while on their way to the thana (police station), Rem Singh and his men were ambushed by Jhagdia Patel's followers. While they made their escape, one of Rem Singh's companions shot and killed one of Jhagdia's men with his bow and arrow. When the police arrived in Kabri for investigations the next day, they beat up the women who had stayed behind in the village after the men had sought refuge in the forest. Following this, Jhagdia Patel's men went on the rampage: the houses of Rem Singh and other anti-liquor activists affiliated with the AMS were looted, vandalized and burnt.

The conflict escalated the next year. In his capacity as Deputy CM, Subhash Yadav made a speech in June 1997 in which he accused the AMS of being a Naxalite organization involved in sabotaging the government's development projects. If he were Home Minister, he proclaimed, the AMS would have been driven out not

just of Madhya Pradesh, but of India. The next month witnessed a spate of attacks on AMS activists.

Repression started with full force, however, after Kaliabhai, an activist with the AMS, made an intervention in the negotiation of a property dispute in the village of Julwania. A panchayat consisting of the *patels* of several villages had been called to adjudicate on a case where two brothers were locked in a conflict over land: one man, Bhimsingh, was accused of having dispossessed his brother Dongarsingh. The panchayat fined Bhimsingh Rs. 35,000 for his offence. Bhimsingh then turned to Kaliabhai for help, who in turn negotiated a reduction of the fine to Rs. 13,000. Bhimsingh was not happy with this result, and directed his anger at Kaliabhai. Encouraged by the local police, he filed charges of extortion against him and 29 other activists belonging to the AMS, none of whom had been involved in the settlement of the dispute in the first place.

This conflict in turn provided Jhagdia Patel with an opening for launching an attack on the AMS. On 25 August, one day after the police had granted him protection, he and a gang of 25 men and a police escort made their way to Kaliabhai's house in Julwania. When they discovered that Kaliabhai was not there, they stripped his wife naked and raped her. Five other women from neighbouring houses were subjected to the same treatment; two young women had their infants snatched from them at gunpoint. The Shanti Sena posse threw the babies in a nearby stream, and their bodies were never recovered. Unsurprisingly, the police failed to register a case against the perpetrators.

Kaliabhai exacted revenge the following day: along with a group of 150 men, he caught up with Jhagdia Patel, his men, and their police escort as they were trying to cross over a small river. The Shanti Sena outfit found itself surrounded, and, along with the police, they barricaded themselves in the house. Kaliabhai and his man demanded that they hand over Jhagdia Patel, and the police pushed him out the door of the house. He was then killed with an arrow, and the party of angry men stoned his corpse.

Cases were registered with the police against more than 80 people for the murder of Jhagdia Patel on 27 August, and a reward of Rs. 10,000 was offered for information about Kaliabhai's whereabouts. In a high-level meeting of the state government, ministers discussed possible ways in which to outlaw the AMS, and on 31 August, SubhashYadav arrived in Kabri and announced that the state government would give Rs. 100,000 to Jhagdia Patel's family as compensation for his death. In a public speech given the following day, Yadav encouraged the Shanti Sena to recruit more activists, and also instructed the police to station five armed people in every village to provide protection against the AMS.

The police established a camp in Kabri, and the Shanti Sena began to tour the area. Villagers were forced to pay a membership fee of Rs. 25, as well as an additional Rs. 11 for a receipt that confirmed that they had paid the membership fee!

In the village of Mandav, in Nepangar block of Khandwa district, some 400 forest guards accompanied by a team of twenty men from the Special Action Force, and led by the Divisional Forest Officer, descended upon villagers who had refused to pay bribes in order for the guards to ignore their *nevad* fields, and started to uproot standing crops. The villagers hurled stones in response, but were met with gunfire from the forest guards and the Special Action Force troops. Two Adivasis were shot dead, and six were injured. Crops were razed to the ground, thus jeopardizing the village's food supply.

A string of arrests followed in September, and leading activists of the AMS eventually convinced Kaliabhai and sixteen other activists to give themselves up to the Deputy Inspector General of Police in Indore. The group was remanded to police custody for two days on 15 September. Two days after this, an armed escort of 15 policemen took Kaliabhai with them on an expedition to locate the firearms that had allegedly been used in killing Jhagdia Patel. As they were travelling back through Kabri, Jhagdia Patel's village, they were surrounded by several hundred people who demanded that the police hand over Kaliabhai. Kaliabhai, who was handcuffed and whose legs were chained, was released to the angry crowd. He was killed with an axe; his corpse was then hacked into small pieces.

Amita Baviskar has rightly pointed out that there was no good reason for taking Kaliabhai on this expedition in the first place: first, Jhagdia Patel had been murdered with a bow and arrow, not a firearm; second, there was no need to return via Kabri village.<sup>73</sup> In a report issued by the PUCL in the wake of the killing, it was therefore dryly stated that 'there [was] complicity of the police in the custodial death of Kalia'.<sup>74</sup>

The murder of Kaliabhai, however, was not the end of the repression of the AMS. Attacks continued into 1998, forcing the leaders of the Sangathan to flee the state due to rumours that police authorities were planning to have them killed in fake encounters. The repression proved to be a dramatic setback for the AMS. Bijoybhai summed it up as follows: 'In the heydays, we were having more than sixty full-timers; and after that repression, after two years of that repression we slid down to six'.<sup>75</sup>

73. A. Baviskar, 'Written on the Body, Written on the Land: Violence and Environmental Struggles in Central India', Working Paper, vol. 2, no. 10, Institute of International Studies, University of California, 2001, p. 16.

74. Ibid., p. 16.

75. Bijoybhai, personal interview, November 2009.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS IN ENCOUNTERS WITH THE LOCAL STATE

The contrasting trajectories of the KMCS and the AMS constitute a useful point of departure for problematizing the dialectics of conjunctural opportunity and structural constraints that characterize the encounter between subaltern social movements and the local state.

Much like the KMCS, the AMS emerged through a series of catalytic show-downs that ultimately managed to curb the violent excesses and corrupt exactions of low-ranking state officials. In both movements, this process generated a spirit of assertiveness in relation to non-Adivasis, and moneylenders, traders, and liquor-dealers were compelled to loosen their grip on the Adivasi communities of Alirajpur and Khargone. And as a result, the activists created an awareness of and a working knowledge about the state and the formal democratic principles upon which it was founded. These skills were in turn put to good use in the further mobilizing process.

There is a crucial difference between the two movements, however, in that the AMS took this process further than the KMCS. Not only did they mobilize five times as many villages as the KMCS, thus making itself a force to be reckoned with on the basis of organizational reach alone, but the AMS also emerged at a conjuncture in which campaigns for Adivasi self-rule had been decisively advanced through the extension of panchayati raj to scheduled areas. PESA is in many ways a good example of how social movements from below can modify the form of the state and its modes of intervention, and, crucially, it provided the AMS with something the KMCS never had, namely a means of institutionalizing Adivasi empowerment that was sanctified by the legislative powers of the highest authority in the land.

The KMCS was by no means whatsoever insignificant in its impact on local state-society relations, but its victories were, in comparison with those of the AMS, of a more moderate nature. In terms of advancing Adivasi empowerment, the Sangath could not proceed beyond an informal *modus vivendi* with the state, which allowed *nevad* cultivation to proceed within certain limits. Correspondingly, the repression that was faced by the KMCS was more moderate than the systematic subjugation that eventually broke the back of the AMS.

In the case of the KMCS, there were two cases of police firing, one of which left a young boy injured, numerous beatings at the hands of police and forest guards, some of which have impaired activists' health for good, and countless false cases, which it has taken years to settle for the people involved. Nevertheless, when the KMCS dissolved in the mid-1990s, it was not a consequence of

repression so much as a result of the fact that middle class activists, for various reasons, left Alirajpur, and the movement had not succeeded in replacing the skills and leadership that these people had provided. In the case of the AMS, a coordinated campaign of violence and terror was orchestrated by, in, and through the state with the active support and approval of its upper political and bureaucratic echelons.

The campaign of repression in turn reveals how dominant groups are able to access the power of the state, and use it efficiently to constrain the advance of the movements of subaltern groups. Whereas the AMS still maintains a presence, the repression that it was subjected to has tamed activist ambitions quite considerably: mobilization is now kept within the bounds of what is acceptable for elite groups, at least for the foreseeable future.<sup>76</sup> And this in turn relates back to the relational conception of subalternity from which this chapter started: the ability of dominant groups to deploy the coercive apparatus of the state with such devastating efficiency is expressive precisely of how ‘the structures of political representation and state intervention involve differential access to the state apparatuses and differential opportunities to realize specific effects in the course of state intervention’.<sup>77</sup>

## CONCLUSION

What the empirical material presented in this chapter shows is that, on the one hand, democratic struggles from below do have the potential to challenge the ways in which subaltern groups are adversely incorporated into a specific set of power relations. This in turn compels us to recognize ‘the possibilities for empowerment that might exist within India’s polity’.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, the chapter has also demonstrated the considerable ability of dominant groups to deploy the power of the state in such a way as to curb the advance of subaltern mobilization. This scenario throws up both conceptual and political challenges.

Conceptually, my main conclusion is as follows. It is of key importance, when we explore subaltern engagements with the state, that we recognize the ways in which social movements from below can and do make use of state institutions, discourses and technologies of rule as they pursue their oppositional projects. The recent wave of Foucauldian approaches to the study of state-society relations in India has made a significant contribution in this respect, but in giving analytical

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76. Personal interviews, 2009–10. 78.

77. B. Jessop, op. cit., 1982, p. 224.

78. Corbridge and Harriss, op. cit., p. 238. Jessop, *State Theory*.

primacy to a decentred notion of state power, these approaches leave us ill-equipped to understand the ways in which the state works in such a way as to reproduce a certain configuration of relations between dominant and subaltern social groups. As J. Harriss and C. Jeffrey (2013: 515, 517) have argued about one of the most recent additions to this body of scholarship – Gupta’s (2012) *Red Tape* – the Foucauldians lose sight of ‘the ways in which “the state” is an organization . . . and operates in ways that are patterned over time’, and this is in turn politically disempowering as it ‘diverts attention from its class character’. Remedying this shortcoming entails the deciphering, first, of the way in which the ‘strategic selectivity of the state’<sup>79</sup> is patterned in a specific context, and, second, analysing the genesis of this patterning across spatial scale and historical time with a view to understanding how it has crystallized through confluences between the political projects of opposing social forces. As I suggested above, Gramscian conceptions of subalternity, hegemony, and state formation may be genuinely helpful in such an endeavour.

The political conclusion that flows from this argument, however, is not one in which the state and its institutions, discourses, and technologies of rule are abandoned as a terrain of mobilization.<sup>80</sup> It is quite evident that in a context of everyday tyranny, for example, the claiming of citizenship is not only highly likely to be a necessary first step in a longer process of mobilization; it is also a fundamentally radical demand with potentially radical consequences for local state-society relations. As an alternative to the Scylla of seeing negotiations with the state as the *only* terrain for subaltern mobilization and the Charybdis of *rejecting* the state *tout court* I would argue that there is much to be gained from translating the analysis of conjunctural opportunities and structural constraints into multi-pronged strategic repertoires which at some levels seek to make the greatest possible gains within the parameters given by a particular, actually-existing state, and at other levels seek to develop counterhegemonic projects that can challenge the fundamental power equations upon which a given state is founded, and thus decisively shift the parameters of mobilization as such.

Such a multi-pronged strategic repertoire would be grounded in what might be called an *instrumental*, as opposed to a *committed*, engagement with the state: that is, an approach based on limited expectations of what can be gained, and clear understandings of what is at risk when appropriating the institutions, discourses, and technologies of rule that make up the state system. Moving simultaneously

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79. Jessop, *State Theory*.

80. See S. Kamat (2002) for an example of such an argument.

within and against the state may prove to be crucial if Adivasis and other subaltern groups in contemporary India are to further their own emancipation.

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