Governance and the Pluralisation of the State
Implications for Democratic Citizenship

The state has been pluralised and now shares power with sub-national governments, proliferating forms of network and partnership organisations, a variety of quasi-public and private organisations, NGOs and international agencies and other forms of supranational governance. What remains of the significance or meaning of the liberal democratic notion of the state as the undisputed centre of political aspirations and its task of pursuing the collective interest when it has been itself enmeshed in a number of organisations? How do we democratise bodies that are out of the reach of representation? How do we ensure that democratic procedures take into account background inequalities?

Governance in other words has thrown up major challenges for the liberal democratic project and we need to think this through. Or should we raise new questions for the project of governance itself?

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Both the concept and the practices of governance have attracted considerable attention as well as a fair amount of enthusiasm among theorists and political practitioners in recent times. The de-centring and the pluralisation of the state into a number of levels that stretch horizontally from civil society and market organisations on the one hand, and vertically from the transnational to local self-government institutions on the other, is considered to be a welcome development for several reasons. For one, governance promises an exit from bureaucratic, hierarchical and overloaded structures of decision-making, which are inept because they are unable to act either quickly or efficiently. The pluralisation of the state enables a multiplicity of agencies – which are free from rigid and tiresome bureaucratic constraints – to respond immediately to problems and issues that require swift resolution.

But the concept of governance has also managed to generate several sets of doubts and confusions in other theoretical quarters. Politically speaking, has the state, at least as we have come to be familiar with it in the 20th century, disappeared? Has it been hollowed out? Or has it been reinvented? Does governance, which presupposes cooperation instead of conflict across a multiplicity of sectors, enhance efficiency? Or does it (governance) make for incoherence because now tasks and powers, which we once considered fell within the domain of state power, have been divided between a number of agents each of which pursue their own specific goals via a number of different and equally specific paths? This is the stuff out of which current debates on governance are constructed.

However, the one normative question that has not been asked by too many theorists is the following: what are the implications of governance for practices of democratic citizenship?1 This broad normative question can actually be divided into three sub-sets of specific questions. Firstly, when the state has been de-centred and pluralised what on earth happens to citizen rights? Have they also been pluralised? Secondly, when the state has been disaggregated horizontally and vertically, which of the many institutions that form part of the networks of governance does the individual look to for the enforcement of his or her rights? Thirdly, how do the various organisations involved in governance view the individual and his or her rights? Do they hold themselves as bound by these rights, or do they see themselves as blissfully unhampered by the notion that rights pose moral restraints on power? After all these institutions do not form part of the formal state, many of them belong to the sphere of civil society, the market, or the domain of global activism. What in short, is the moral status of the rights bearing citizen amidst all this welter and criss-crossing networks of power and structures of decision-making?

These questions I consider are of particular concern for India, simply because institutions of substantive democracy have, for a series of historical reasons, been only weakly articulated in the country.2 Governance may make for efficiency and flexibility in the making of decisions. This is incontrovertible. But a word of warning may be in order here – that practices of governance may also aggravate a specific tendency that we find governing political imaginations today: that of technocratic management of politics.

Move from Centralised State to Governance

Political theorists are more or less familiar with the historical context within which the idea of democratic citizenship took root and flourished. They are more or less conversant with the organically constituted and mutually interdependent relationship...
between two sets of historical processes. The first process transforms the ‘individual as subject’ to ‘individual as citizen’. The second set to the growth of the modern state. This is not to say that either the process or the relationship between these two sets of processes is free of tensions. On the one hand the modern state, which in colonised countries takes the appearance of the colonial state, gathers up power from a plurality of dispersed agencies in pre-modern polities, and constructs a single, hierarchical, and unified system of power. On the other hand the centralisation of power in the form of the state is subjected to an entire range of constraints – rules of law, constitutions, but more particularly the rights of the inhabitants of the polity. The first paradox of the modern state is that whereas it has more power than pre-modern political formations, it is also subjected to the kind of limitations, however abstract they may be [e.g., the rule of law], that did not constrain pre-modern states. For the power of pre-modern states was arguably based on thinly spread out but nevertheless overlapping complexes of highly personalised relationships.

To phrase the issue differently, the limits upon the power of the modern state stem from one simple fact – that the inhabitants of the polity are endowed with rights. Now rights accrue to individuals for no other reason than the fact that they are human. Or that individual rights supervene upon something that we conceptualise as human. They are in other words not granted by states, they are a given. They are therefore in a manner of speaking pre-political. Rights acquire a political edge and political clout in two circumstances. One when individuals articulate and assert these rights in the form of claims upon the polity. Secondly, when democratic states recognise these rights, when they grant them status in the form of law; when they uphold these rights against other notions of individual-state relations [patrimonialism for instance], and when the judiciary defends these rights against violations. The second paradox of modern democracy is rather interesting for the political theory of individual rights. Though individual rights bind the state, it is precisely the state that recognises these rights as moral constraints; it is the state which translates these rights into legal norms, and it is the state which upholds these rights through the Constitution and the judiciary. In sum, the state, through a series of bridging movements, connects the possession of rights and the actualisation of rights.

Now the moment states recognise rights as morally binding, two politically significant things happen. One, a category called the ‘individual’ makes the transition to a category that we recognise as the ‘rights bearing citizen’. Secondly, the moment the state recognises rights as moral constraints upon its own power that power is imprinted with legitimacy. Power is in other words translated into authority. If we were to put it differently, we could suggest that individual rights allow the newly constituted citizen to participate in the founding moment of state legitimacy.

Certainly, the political situation that comes about is contradictory. It is even confusing. The modern state possesses the kind of power that was perhaps unknown to earlier forms of states in history: the power of surveillance, the power to regulate the lives of its people, the power to mould public opinion, the power to create a compliant body of citizens. But simultaneously the state also recognises the limits upon its own exercise of power. These limits are, of course, constituted by the notion of inalienable and indivisible individual rights, which in democratic states are codified into constitutional law. The second contradiction is the following: even though human beings possess rights by virtue of being human, they are dependent upon this defined and identifiable state for the practical and legal enforcement of their rights. They are in fact dependent on the state for the recognition of these rights. What I want to suggest is that historically we find a reciprocal and interdependent relationship between the recognition of rights (as distinct from the possession of rights), and the existence of a single, definable, identifiable system of authority that we term the state.

Today, in the days of governance, we have a qualitatively different notion of the state on our hands. The state is now represented as just one of the many agencies, organisations, or associations that dot the landscape. Since each of these organisations is involved in activities that affect the lives of the people, they are significant for the collective. For example if the state intervenes in say a famine-stricken area to provide welfare to the people, so do a host of other agencies – philanthropic, charity, or human rights organisations, voluntary citizens associations, international relief bodies, donor agencies and NGO’s.

Certainly each association/organisation possesses a specific logic of its own in the sense that it possesses a distinct sensibility. Consequently it approaches the same issue from different vantage points. Let me elaborate the point. Consider that the approach of a charity organisation that extends aid to the victims of famine will be quite different to that of a human rights organisation, which is also involved in giving relief. The former will by definition ground its obligations to the people in notions of benevolence and compassion. The latter will reason that it is obliged to help people simply because people have the right to be helped in such conditions. Notions of compassion and benevolence after all belong to a different conceptual universe than the idea of individual rights. Further, the reasoning of humanitarian organisations as well as human rights organisations may be quite different to the approach of the democratic state. The democratic state may consider itself obliged by reasons of citizen’s rights, by its own obligation to the citizens, and by its ideology of welfare.

For theories of governance these differences in vantage points is not half as important as the fact that all these organisations are engaged in similar sorts of activity: that is delivering services along with the state. That is why all of them are partners in a wider project. What is significant is that the state is no longer seen as the only or even the main player in collective life. It is important, but it is one player among many.

Actually at first glance the new orthodoxy of governance seems to bear a deep resemblance to the old and by now discredited pluralist model, which had perceptibly shifted the balance of power from state to society. But when we take a hard look at the literature available to us today, we find at least two major differences between pluralism and governance. Firstly, despite the fact that pluralism recognised that society is constituted by a number of dense associations, it assumed that these organisations pursued their own distinctive, different, and separable interests and goals. They therefore competed with each other. And this was a distinct good, for competition between different groups achieved a rough and ready balance of power in and for society. Secondly, the pluralists had demoted the state to being just another, and not necessarily the most consequential institution among a variety of other associations. But in the ultimate instance, when social transactions broke down, the state was expected to perform the role of arbitrator and regulator. Theories of governance on the other hand assume that distinct institutions pursue
overlapping ends, even if they track different paths to the same goal. Thirdly theories of governance are more ambivalent as far as the state is concerned. The state may or may not define the regulatory mechanisms that lay down the ground rules for networking. It may turn out that the state is just one and not necessarily the most important institution in governance. The role of the state in governance in other words is contextual as well as contingent.

In the same vein, theories of civil society tended to see the domain of social associations as more important than the state for the citizen. But they also recognised a clear division between the state and the non-state, i.e., civil society. So whereas the civil society argument privileged social associations, it also realised that the rules for these associations are charted by the state. Whereas the distinction between the state and the non-state, which was so crucial to the modern imagination has not disappeared in theories of governance, it has certainly been rendered less not more relevant.

Whether governance is descriptive inasmuch as it notes and registers a state of affairs that has already come into existence, or whether it is prescriptive in that it seeks to bring about such a state of affairs is difficult to say. If we were to put it differently, we could argue that it is both descriptive and prescriptive. A model that emerged in response to the crisis of the welfare state in the advanced capitalist world has now been extended particularly to the countries of Asia and Africa, via conditions attached to financial aid, policy prescriptions, and new notions of development. But that is a different story altogether, a story that requires a different kind of narrativisation.

What is significant for our purposes is that governance firstly pluralises and decentralises the state, by making it part of a network, which stretches not only from the global to the local but from the market to civil society. Secondly, various levels of governance engage in partnerships that are based on cooperation rather than conflict. Thirdly, they (the relationships) connect to each other via horizontal linkages rather than through vertical chains of command. Fourthly, the relationships between different partners are flexible rather than bureaucratic.

It is interesting to note in this connection that the assumptions that underpin the shift from the regulatory to the networking state, were precisely the same assumptions that governed the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist patterns of industrial management. But whereas the resemblance between the shift in the economy and the polity is uncanny, it is neither mere coincidence nor happenstance. It happens to be part of a wider project that was to restructure the economy, the polity, and society in the last two decades of the 20th century.

II
Parallel Shift in Industrial Formations

By the first three decades of the 20th century, the idea that a centralised, hierarchical, and bureaucratic state, which by definition is also highly interventionist, became dominant in the UK, in the US, and in the Soviet Union. This was the very model that was generalised to the newly postcolonial world by the middle of the century in the form of the developmentalist state. The moot point is that in the same first three decades of the last century, we were also to witness the emergence of the modern industrial firm, which was as much centralised, as hierarchical, and as bureaucratic as the modern state. It is not surprising that thereon
from another internal division and gave to a third, were widely emulated over the world. By the last decades of the 20th century, however, industrial firms have been de-centred and the rules of corporate practices have been profoundly challenged by post-Fordist strategies of management.

The transformation is not insignificant. In fact it is dramatic. For one, each division of the industrial unit instead of cooperating with other divisions in pursuit of a single set of objectives, is now relatively autonomous of them. This makes for flexibility inasmuch as the managers of each unit are free to innovate and respond quickly to market fluctuations in design management. Secondly, internal units within a factory today need not exchange either goods or services with each other. They are free to exchange goods and services with units in other industrial firms. This strategy, which was put into practice by Xerox, and adopted by Phillips and IBM, enables flexible and economical transactions between individual divisions of different firms rather than between the units of one firm.

Consequently the rigidity and the hierarchy that characterised Fordist systems of industrial management, have been replaced by matrix-like structures of management in large companies such as IBM or AT and T. Firstly, internal units transact with each other on the basis of partnerships instead of on the basis of a single and vertical chain of command. Secondly, relationships between different firms are based on the same idea. Large firms are now free to enter into pre-competitive partnerships, in the shape of say consortia, with other firms in the same business or with firms in other kinds of businesses. For example big firms such as AT and T have entered into a partnership with Hewlett-Packard. Or large banks such as Citi Bank and HSBC have negotiated partnerships with credit card companies such as Master Card and VISA. Thirdly, large corporations tend to subcontract both production and services outwards to other companies. We find this practice in the case of the Toyota Motor Corporation in Toyota City. It after all proves more economical to buy from a smaller firm than depend on in-house production and services.

To sum up the shift, instead of the vertically and hierarchically organised corporation that institutionalised an internal chain of command and accountability, today we see the development of decentralised loose industrial structures that enter into networking relationships both internally and externally.13 Secondly, and more importantly, the practice of subcontracting outside the firm to other organisations has made a come back. This was the precise way in which production was organised in the days that preceded Fordism. Thirdly, we see the return of partnerships between different firms. Fourthly, elasticity in management procedures, which were earlier bureaucratic and rigid, and the emergence of partnerships where once there was competition, allows for flexible patterns of accumulation. All in all, the once vertically organised and self-contained factory has been disaggregated both internally as well as externally. This has had its obvious consequences inasmuch as the working class has no one locus of capitalist power, which it can position itself against. It has to deal with different units operating in different ways in one industrial firm, with units entering into partnerships with other units in other firms, and with units subcontracting to yet another firm. It is not surprising that working class politics has been in the process disabled, and numerous scholars speak of the disappearance of the blue-collar working class and of associated notions of class conflict.

This particular development has been supported by the adoption in many industrial firms of what are called ‘Japanese’ business methods. The development is of some importance when we remember that the industrial firm has generally been seen as the site which condenses the contradictions of a society. The shape that this contradiction takes is that of the class encounter between the shop-floor worker and the management/ownership of the factory. The factory was after all in Marxist theory represented as the ground for the development and nourishment of class and revolutionary consciousness. Today under the influence of Japanese business methods relationships between the workers and the managers have been dramatically transformed from conflict to partnership. In several firms managerial dining rooms have been closed down in favour of one canteen, everyone from the top managers to the shop floor workers wear one uniform, and the industrial firm itself is conceptualised as akin to the extended family, where everyone has duties more than rights.14 That this has affected the concept of class conflict, revolutionary consciousness, and individual rights irrevocably is not surprising. One can hardly insist on rights or initiate a class war against the CEO who is represented as the patriarch of an extended family.15

In much the same way, the state has been disaggregated vertically and pluralised horizontally. Or to use postmodern terminology, the state has been decentred. Far from representing the apex of a structure of power that begins in the family and ascends upwards through a variety of associations in the market and civil society,16 the state is seen as enmeshed in a number of organisations. Each of these organisations as suggested above is considered important, since it engages in tasks that bear on the lives of people, since it takes decisions that affect individual and collective existences, and since it performs services for its constituency. Accordingly, state institutions network with other organisations that were formerly contained within the non-state sphere of civil society. They subcontract to voluntary groups and NGOs in matters of service delivery. And they work alongside citizen groups in matters that range from management of foreign policy17 to the implementation of human rights. And just like in the post-Fordist factory, relationships between the state and non-state institutions are no longer considered conflictual but as based on consensus and partnerships. State structures have been loosened, they have been disaggregated, and they have spanned out.

**III**

**Tracing the Shift**

Arguably these parallel changes in the industrial firm and in the state, in politics and in political economy, were prompted by one notable fact. Both structures of production and strategies of industrial management had run out of steam by the late 1970s. Fordist strategies of accumulation had led to top heavy, bureaucratic, and inefficient industrial practices, which were unable to respond promptly to the economic crisis that beset first the developed and then the developing world. The built infrastructure of the factory had degenerated. Full trade unionism, which followed the post-second world war economic boom, proved a barrier to increased productivity and efficiency. Technology in the meantime had been reconstituted in the shape of the informational revolution based on the electronic chip. It was now possible to conceive of new methods of production based on information...
networking. But this in turn required a different kind of labour-management relationship altogether. More importantly, since full trade unionism had bedevilled production and strained the resources of the managerial cadres, all this needed to be contained. This containment was effected through the adoption of post-Fordism.

The assumptions that informed the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist structures of accumulation are in the main three. Firstly, what was historically theorised as the basic tension in the industrial firm, that between the propertied and the non-propertied classes has been transcended. Secondly, it is now widely believed that the interests of the workers are and should be subordinated to the interests of the company. And thirdly, it is held that collective life in the work place is or at least should be marked by social capital and trust, rather than conflict and struggle. Theories of trust, which swept the world in the late 1980s and early 1990s were to conjure away the basic conflict between the non-propertied and the propertied classes by a piece of semantic engineering.

The same critique, which was levelled against the firm, was to be levelled against the state. One, that the state by itself, no matter whatever be the extent of its power, was unable to manage the kind of problems that modern society throws up – from ethnic conflict to the delivery of clean drinking water. If by the middle of the 20th century, the idea that the state is naturally interventionist had preoccupied political thinking and imaginations, by the end of that century confidence in this particular form of the state had waned. If the early decades of the 20th century had witnessed optimism that the state could and should look after the poor and the deprived (the welfare state), that it should and could regulate the market (the Keynesian state), that it should encode the aspirations of its people for an egalitarian society (the developmentalist state) or that it should pursue development (the developmentalist state), the idea was exhausted by the end of the century.

Today a number of events have cast a long shadow on the ability of the state to deliver. They have also cast an equal shadow of doubt on the idea that the state should be in the business of being all things to all people. What is interesting in the context of this argument is that the reasoning that was offered for the decentering of the state was exactly the one that was offered for the decentering of the modern industrial firm. The state, exactly like the modern industrial firm, is considered to be incapable of delivering what it is supposed to deliver, simply because it is regarded as highly bureaucratic, top heavy, and inefficient. Moreover, the proliferation of demands around the state, simply because it was the central and the most visible actor in society, created an overload of political claims. This further hampered state projects. The modern state had in short to be re-invented.

Of course, this development like the parallel events in the world of work was neither unplanned nor unintended. It was the product of two strands of thinking, which originally appearing in the guise of Thatcherism and Reaganism, came to dominate the world since the late 1970s. One strand of argument had to do with efficiency and accountability. The state, which by the middle of the 20th century had taken on too many tasks, suffered from both a crisis of governability as well as a crisis of legitimacy. It suffered from a crisis of governability because it was overloaded with tasks and with demands from civil society, which saw the state as the centre of all things. It suffered from a crisis of legitimacy because it was not performing.

The second argument, which actually provided both the rationale as well as legitimacy for the first, had to do with the re-establishment of the notion that the market is an institution that makes use of available resources and skills with some degree of proficiency. Recollect that this is a notion that John Maynard Keynes had exposed as so much mythology in the 1930s. And he was not the first economist to do so. In the 19th century Karl Marx had concluded that capitalist economies have a violent tendency towards repeated and cyclic crisis. This crisis takes the form of widespread unemployment of labour, as well as the failure of product markets to provide adequate outlets for existing productive capacity. The reproductive process of capitalism rather than proceeding slowly and steadily, argued Marx, advances through a sequence of “explosions, cataclysms, crises” 18. Though Keynes eschewed this kind of polemical language, he was to launch a sharp critique of neo-classical theories, which had argued that an unregulated market system naturally and effortlessly utilises the productive potential of a society.

Keynes concluded in 1936 that left to itself the capitalist economy may settle into a situation of significant underutilisation of resources. In particular, he was to write, “it is an outstanding characteristic of the economic system in which we live that, whilst it is subject to severe fluctuations in respect of output and employment, it is not violently unstable. Indeed it seems capable of remaining in a chronic condition of sub-normal activity for a considerable period without any marked tendency either towards recovery or towards complete collapse. Moreover, the evidence indicates that full, or even approximately full, employment is of rare and short lived occurrence.” 19 But this insight was to become irrelevant for the opponents of the interventionist state who argued that this particular form of state had steadily and relentlessly stifled the self-regulating propensity of the market. Their sharpest critique was reserved for the welfare state. Welfarism, it was suggested, had placed large domains of economic transactions, in say education or health, outside the reach of market transactions. Unemployment allowances, subsidised or free education and health and pensions had not only placed a great burden on state officials, they had constrained the market because it could not utilise resources and profit that were unavailable to it and that could have been easily translated into capital. This had weakened the economy, uncovered the inefficiency of state officials, and created a class of the perennially unemployed, who had developed a vested interest in not working, since they were in any case provided for by welfarism. Besides the very centrality and the visibility of the state had exposed it to too many demands from civil society, demands that it could not possibly fulfil. In sum, dominant strains of opinion concluded by the late 1970s that traditional forms of state action were exhausted.

This was the precise kind of reasoning that underpinned the ascendance of neo-liberalism. And neo-liberalism simply demanded one thing, that the state should roll back from many areas where it had become active, responsible, and regulative. 20 The market replaced the state as the newest god on the political horizon. And all the reservations that had been expressed through the years about the ability of the market to autonomously manage the economy were brushed away as so much fluff. 21 Even as the late 1980s saw the rapid ascendance of neo-liberalism, the collapse of actually existing socialist societies lent further credence to the view that the state is not the solution to the problem but part of the problem itself.
The implications of all these critiques were clear. For the road that the critics of the state were to traverse, was also the same road that led to the idea of the minimalist state. Firstly, the state had to draw back from its self-appointed task of regulating the market, and providing for the people. Secondly, the business of not only economic growth, but also that of distribution was to be left to the market. The state as the popular adage went has no business to be in business. Thirdly, people in civil society should be responsible for their own social reproduction. That is they should not look to the state for either protection or succour. This carried rather serious implications. For all those disadvantaged groups who were not in a position to ensure their social reproduction, and who had been enabled to do so by the welfare state, were now thrown upon the not so tender mercies of the market and a rather uncivil society.

The arguments of the neo-liberals, initially designed for the developed world that was experiencing a major economic crisis, were buttressed and extended into other parts of the world by a major development, in the face of which states, particularly postcolonial states appeared to be completely helpless. The process is familiar to us in and of the postcolonial world; it is called globalisation. Though it is increasingly difficult to define globalisation, the implications of this process – or rather of a series of processes – are unmistakable. Globalisation has enabled the transmission of capital across the world as if national boundaries are non-existent. Correspondingly, through the processes of globalisation natural and national resources have been appropriated in the cause of capital. Local knowledge systems have been harnessed and patented for the same purpose. And flows of information and messages that tell people how they should think and what they should think have legitimised the process itself. Therefore, despite all difficulties in capturing the essence of globalisation, we can accept that its core is constituted by a distinct phenomenon: capital’s restless and relentless pursuit of profit across the world. Today we see capital flitting across national borders as if they were just not there.

But also note that there is nothing natural or given in the processes of capital flows that ensures this much-needed erosion of state boundaries, or the destruction of the tariff walls that fledging economies in the postcolonial world had erected against the onslaught of global capital. To put it sharply, if capital more fledgling economies in the postcolonial world had erected against the limits of state boundaries, or the destruction of the tariff walls that had been erected against the onslaught of global capital, a combination of two events – the global turn to democracy that followed the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989 and the impact of transnational human rights movements in the 1990s – furthered the post-Washington consensus. For neither is the idea of the minimalist state and a free market continue to provide the basis for the defenders of globalisation. For if a system is widely perceived as unjust, it will necessarily engender resistance. However, despite some rather major changes in rhetoric, the post-Washington consensus continues to retain significant elements of the earlier neo-liberal consensus. For neither is the idea that a free market encourages democracy put aside, nor is the role of the state in institutionalising and realising democracy reconsidered. In the current dispensation, both a slimmed down or minimal state and a free market continue to provide the conditions of a strong and democratic civil society. What was recognised was that the discontent that rocked societies by the late 1990s had to be managed by the provision of services, by lessening poverty, and by erecting social safety nets. But it was not the state alone that had to provide these services as the earlier welfare state did. States had proved notoriously incompetent in this regard; they had done nothing except to create powerful bureaucracies and even more powerful politicians who had cornered the benefits of economic growth. Consequently the state had to
enter into partnerships with organisations in civil society, the market, and with transnational organisations, to effect the governance of globalisation. The fanning out of the state, the spanning out of the state, the privatisation of state and para-state institutions, and the subcontracting of state functions, is what governance is about.

The notion of governance is admittedly significant because it manifests a retreat from economism and market fundamentalism. But again it is important to note that this does not imply a weakening of the general commitment to free market policies. Countries receiving assistance had to continue with privatisation and liberalisation of their economies, open their borders to foreign investment and trade, keep wages low, and adopt macroeconomic policies favouring price stability over growth. Arguably, concern with good governance and institutional reform was supervened onto neo-liberal agendas to make them more efficient and less controversial.25

To sum up this section, since the state had shown limited ability to plan, forecast, and take action, it must do two things. One, it must reduce public expenditure, lessen its involvement with collective life, and trim down its size. Secondly, it must involve and integrate outside agents into the tasks of governance. On the other hand, or so it was reasoned, partnership brings numerous benefits. If various agencies join together with state institutions, pool their resources, expertise, skills, and plans, and form new coalitions for action based on sharing of responsibilities, this may prove more efficacious that the state acting by itself and often for itself. Not only can each partner teach the other a great deal; together they form a community for action that has access to more resources, and more experience. Each of the organisations join in sectoral networks that focus on problems to be solved, each of these networks are based on notions of the mutual good.

Within this new distribution of tasks, the behaviour of different parties: state, para-state, and non-state agencies whether these be national and international movements, pressure groups, reconstructed trade unions, human rights organisations, or non-governmental organisations, can be directed towards the joint seeking of the public good. Governance simply involves a transfer from a top-down to an interactive regulatory process, or to a ‘networking’ polity.

It was in this precise context that NGOs became important agents in civil society. They assumed an expanded role in development work and in the delivery of services. Many of them worked with grass roots movements to advance citizen’s rights through legal reform and strategies to empower the poor. Regional development agencies called for social practices that could activate greater participation, for community level networks, and for building of ties of social solidarity. All this was to serve as a counterweight to the anomic caused by poverty, informalisation and unemployment. In turn this development converged with ‘good governance’ reform agendas that sought to render state institutions more effective and accountable.26 Consequently, (a) the division between the state and the non-state sector has been re-negotiated, (b) the state is expected to act as a mediator, or an enabler, or a meta-regulator rather than as the apex authority, (c) subcontracting in service delivery and increased involvement of private agencies is both recognised and validated, and (d) concern now centres around the creation of rules for collective action and for the steering of governance. This obviously holds some consequential implications for traditional notions of politics. It is towards an exploration of some of these implications that the following section is organised.

**IV**

**Governance: Implications for Democratic Citizenship**

Arguably the recognition that individuals are enmeshed in different but overlapping structures, each of which takes decisions that affect deeply the life of these individuals, is a welcome development. For even in the heyday of welfarism or developmentalism individuals were after all involved in a variety of associations other than the state. And these associations did perform critical services for them. Think of reading clubs that bring knowledge to the ordinary individual. The reading club may be more important to the ordinary individual with a passion for learning than a distant state which may never touch her life. Or for a battered woman, her feminist support group may give her the kind of sustenance that no department of the government would ever be able to deliver. And we can multiply these examples. Therefore, the recognition that numerous associations and organisations exercise great influence on the lives of their members grants recognition to the realities of everyday life.

Nevertheless there is one problem, which like the proverbial ghost of things past, stalks the current orthodoxy of governance. The problem is simply the following. In and through traditional political arrangements, the individual plus the various groupings and associations that affected the life of the aforesaid individual, bore a direct albeit a mediated relationship with the state as the seat of sovereign authority. Conversely, whereas the state exercised enormous power over its citizens, it was held responsible to the body of citizens through practices of democratic accountability.

The concept of governance, which arguably belongs to a universe of postmodern politics, gestures towards the pluralisation of what used to be a single locus of power and authority—the state. What, we may justifiably ask, are the implications of this development for practices of democratic citizenship? For, as suggested above, democratic citizenship, at least as we know it in the 20th century, has been dependent on a state, which recognises rights as moral constraints on its own power. Correspondingly, a strong state is not wholly incompatible with a state that is responsive to demands from civil society. It has to be strong in order not to get bogged down in pressure politics. Conversely, civil society needs to be somewhat autonomous from the state in order to acquire political competence, in order to chart out a discourse on what is politically desirable, and in order to hold the state accountable.27

New theories of governance on the other hand tend to dissolve this division between the state and civil society. Now this represents an interesting turn in thinking about the state. Theories of the corporatist state, as we know it in Singapore for instance, spoke about the incorporation of civil society and market organisations into the state via a series of partnership arrangements. On the whole this was not considered desirable simply because it blunted the power of civil society organisations, which should desirably be semi-autonomous of the state, to imprint and impact state policy. Today we see developments taking the reverse direction, and the state is expected to merge in civil society and in the market.
For governance is considered good when the state retrenches, becomes less powerful, assumes a low profile, and operates in a network with private interests and groups, each of which is as powerful as the other. The usual question that is asked in this context is the following – has the state disappeared? Now obviously the state cannot disappear simply because it has to identify key stakeholders, develop linkages between them, influence and steer relations to bring about a balance between different agents, and manage the system in the sense of avoiding negative side-effects and establishing mechanisms for effective co-ordination.28 Further, it is the state that after all decides which organisation to network with, which group to support, and which norm of co-operation to be strengthened.29

Therefore it is evident that whereas the state as the predominant actor in governance has not certainly disappeared, it has been pluralised. The consequences for the prime concerns of democratic theory are rather momentous. They demand major rethinking of democratic theory. For now we cannot conceptualise the relationship of the citizen to only one institution that is the state, since he or she has been brought into a relationship with any number of institutional environments. To put it differently, it is possible that we may see a divorce between the intricacies of decision-making associated with governance, and the normative codes that regulate relations between the individual and the state. For whereas it is the state that continues to be thought of as the institution that recognises and respects the rights of the citizen, the life of the citizen is regulated by a number of agencies, which may well concentrate on administration and not politics. Politics as the art of negotiating between competing interests has been overtaken by the idea that these interests need to be brought into harmony with each other through the employment of managerial techniques. That is why the concept of governance has often been represented as post-political.

Let me put it this way, despite the many flaws that are associated with the classic model of democracy, it at least provided a clear institutional channel for (a) the participation of citizens, (b) for the representation of their interests, (c) and for clear lines of accountability. All this was captured by the notion of representation. Citizens had the right to represent themselves and their interests albeit via an intermediary layer of representatives to and in the state.

Certainly matters have never been as straightforward, for practices of representation have inevitably come to possess some measure of autonomy. In the process we may not find a direct one-to-one relationship between an already formed pre-political will of the people and the transformation of this pre-political will into policy. For between the people and the state lies a whole series of practices that we term representation. The way practices of representation articulate common interests, prioritise these interests and the way these interests are re-presented to the state, may actually serve to detach these interests from their representation.

Let me elaborate, for instance if a group of women translate their experiences with patriarchy into a form of the expressive that we call feminism, the act is political. It is political inasmuch as it links what is experienced, to an analysis of what is wrong with patriarchy, and to what should be done about it. Conversely, when feminism helps other women to interpret their experiences through the prism afforded by the ideology, we have on our hands the political translation of the expressive into the experiential. Politics is a two-way activity ranging from what is experienced into how it is represented in the form of the expressed, and from what is expressed into an interpretation of what is experienced. But politics is also a plural activity inasmuch as it negotiates between different and contested forms of the expressive. Out of this web of contestation we derive a sense of what people want and need, desire and yearn for. In yet another sense politics is about the translation of different forms of the expressive into policy. And since the making of policy takes place in the political domain of the state, the political and the civil domain of collective life are connected through practices of representation.

Actually we discover at least three levels of representation in all these processes. At the first level the way experiences are articulated into the expressive involves practices of representation – the representation of the experienced into the expressed. Secondly, the way different representations, which inevitably contest each other, are brought into a relationship with each other. In the process, some forms are cancelled out, some are mediated, some compromise, and some win out.30 Thirdly the translation of the expressed in the domain of civil society into policy programmes at the level of the political society also involves representation. At this level representation prioritises, marginalises and gives preference to some forms of the expressive over the other.

Between the experimental and the ultimate making of policy, therefore, stretches an entire web of mediation brought into being by practices of representation. How we interpret experiences of say patriarchy is thus itself the outcome of a political process, and how we become aware of ourselves as women in a given society is as much the outcome of practices of representation. It is not surprising that Laclau suggests that “representation is a necessary moment in the self-constitution of the totality”.31 It is not surprising that representation and those who do the representing are seen as not only autonomous of the popular will but as elites who through the practices of representation participate in the construction of a political community. Laclau is clear about this, “no pure relation of representation”, he argues, “is obtainable because it is of the essence of the process of representation that the representative has to contribute to the identity of what is represented”.32 Representatives do not in other words only register the will of the people; they are engaged in the shaping of the will. Or experiences are articulated into the expressive through discursive will formation.

Representation therefore modifies our understanding of democratic theory, which tells us that people represent their interests in the state through an activity we call politics. It makes visible the mediations as well as mediators, the practices as well as the practitioners. Therefore, the questions that naturally come up are the following: are citizens and their needs represented at all in political society? Or are citizens as well as their needs constructed by practices of representation? These are questions that justifiably are of concern to any committed theorist of democracy.

And yet to conclude from this that people are passive consumers of agendas that may be constructed in their name, but which have nothing to do with either their experiences or what they want to do with them, may be unfair. For despite all the reservations about representation, we need to accept that at some point people that are in the business of representation are accountable to the citizens, even if minimally at the times of election. And in India at least we have known of many cases where representatives have been thrown out of power if the people feel that their cause has not been properly depicted. The outcome of the elections in Jammu and Kashmir in October 2002 is an instance of this. Unless we in an act of supreme political cynicism or unless we in the
Foucauldian mode dismiss everything as subject to manipulation of elite preferences, or unless we dismiss the political competence of the people as so much chimera, there is some virtue in the very publicity of representative politics.

To put it differently, whereas the status of citizens as primary units of civil and political society is incontrovertible, the status of the representatives is derivative. They derive their status from the fact that they represent the interests of individual members. Citizens have, at least in theory, command over who they want to be represented by. They are also in a position to choose what particular issue they consider worthy of representation, as well as how they want this issue or sets of issues to be represented. There may be and there are many problems with these and other related assumptions. Some of the problems with the idea have been dealt with above. At this point of the argument, however, I wish to suggest that the very idea of representation may be in trouble, if we begin to think that elites in non-representative institutions represent the interests of the people.

What happens, we can now proceed to ask, when numerous centres of power, I particularly have in mind NGOs, claim to represent the needs of the people? Of course in one sense this may be welcome since now a number of elites in the economy, in NGOs, in decentralised local governments, and in trade unions compete over the definition of what is desirable in politics and what is a desirable politics. Etzioni-Halevey for instance sees increased political competition between elites about the legitimate right to define the content of the interests of the people as a distinct advantage for democracy.33 This competition, she suggests, prevents the emergence of a single elite that monopolises power, it promotes openness and publicity and aids information, and it increases the quality of governance because one set of elites is constantly faced with competition from another set. The problem is that in her theory, like in all theories concerned with elites and their fortunes, the people drop out altogether, they just disappear. They have nothing to do with politics or with democracy. Etzioni-Halevey is supremely unconcerned with this, for her argument is that elites should operate autonomously of popular sentiments. Competition between political elites, which is the cornerstone of democracy, calls for autonomy from unnecessary constraints such as the popular will. This kind of theory frankly has nothing to do with democracy or with popular aspirations or democratic sentiments. It is uncomfortably reminiscent of elite theories which emerging at the turn of the 20th century disclosed unease with popular movements in civil society. It is perhaps an indication of our times, that the issue of managing and controlling, checkmating or countering elites in position of power acquires more salience, than the responsibility of the elites to the people who get them into these positions in the first place.

And when we come to elites who will never face the people at all, matters become even more troublesome. For apart from the legislators who have no choice except to face citizens during elections, none of these elites is popularly elected. And they are not likely to be popularly elected at any point of time, because that is not their mandate. This really means that while these sub-elites are in the business of governing, they are not in the business of being accountable to the people for their acts of omission and commission. Governance brings to us a division of power, and a division of functions that were formerly within the provenance of the state. Does it also bring to us a sense of a division of accountability inasmuch as all the partners in governance are responsible to the people, even if this has to happen once in five years during election time? Correspondingly, which of the organisations which have been rightly called simulacra of governments are answerable to the citizens, or even accountable to elected local and central governments? This leads to some confusion. Frankly citizens are at a loss, when it comes to matters like who governs and how. For most of them are excluded from access to organisations that claim to provide services on behalf of the people and that claim to represent them.

Because a great many of the organisations who are governing are beyond the reach of genuine democratic activity, the idea that a definable system of authority is even notionally answerable to the democratic will has been seriously compromised. And now note how even the most unresponsive of state officials have been forced at some time to be responsible to the people and their organisations. Think of the fate of Suharto in Indonesia in 1998, for instance. After the Indonesian military had massacred more than 150 participants in a funeral procession in Dili, East Timor, in 1991, transnational human rights organisations mobilised massively against the political abuses of the Suharto regime. Under pressure from these organisations, Canada, Denmark, and the Netherlands froze economic aid to Indonesia, and the US, Japan, and the World Bank threatened similar measures. Suharto appointed a National Investigation Commission which issued a mildly critical report of the incident; and aid was resumed. But he was to rapidly lose control of events as the people of Indonesia and East Timor mobilised to criticise and publicise the violation of human rights. Opposition mounted even as Suharto designated a national human rights commission, whose reports added to the general discontent. In 1996, even as the leaders of civil society in East Timor—Jose Ramos Horta and Bishop Ximenes Belo—were given the Nobel Peace Prize, the blitzkrieg launched by the citizens of the country strengthened the general atmosphere of dissatisfaction, despite the intensified repression launched by the regime. In late 1997 the country was buffeted by an economic crisis and mass protests led to the resignation of Suharto. The people of the country had managed to spectacularly overthrow a regime on the grounds that it was not representing the will of the people.

And now consider whether the same is true of say a powerful service delivery NGO. “We must be concerned” suggests Peters, with the extent to which complex structures linking the public and private sectors actually mask responsibility and add to the problems of citizens in understanding and influencing the actions of their governments”.34 This would matter less if the majority of the important organisations that make up governance were subject to local democratic control, and if their internal practices were conducive to democratic manners. All evidence suggests on the other hand that organisations which are only weakly accountable do nothing of the kind, that they promote conformity, and that they are indifferent to notions of democratic citizenship.35 And this is a matter of some concern considering the range of activities that have been taken up by these organisations.

Secondly, does the involvement of NGOs, or private sector agencies in the life of the people enhance the political competence of the constituency or diminish it? For one, many of these organisations consist of bodies of specialists who are engaged in the business of managing the many spheres of collective life. They are just not in the business of engaging in an activity that we call politics. This may justifiably give us cause for thought. For democratic citizenship is meant to be empowering, inasmuch as when ordinary men and women engage in political activity,
they acquire agency, they recover self-hood, and they earn self-confidence. This is politics in the best Aristotelian tradition: politics as self-realisation. But when these very people are told what to do and how to go about doing it by agencies which are both managerial and specialised we may see a de-politicising of daily life. As four distinguished scholars of east Asian 'illiberal democracy' tell us, civil society and a critical public sphere are already managed by a rationalistic and legalistic technocracy. It is not difficult to believe that governance intensifies this trend to stifle democracy. To put it bluntly, people are disempowered rather than empowered when highly specialised and more often than not bureaucratised 'professionals' tell them how they should resolve the problems of their collective lives.

Admittedly, some of the partners in structures of governance have initiated novel ways of resolving the problems of everyday existence of poor and impoverished people of the third world. When they train people in methods of water harvesting, or organic ways of growing food, or when they provide services that the state has proved incapable of delivering, or when they design innovative educational programmes, they render signal service. But can this substitute for an activity we call politics? Are they not engaged in mere management?

Let me put this differently: when individuals who are otherwise far too preoccupied in eking out a bare and minimum subsistence in adverse conditions, come together and think out how to resolve their situation they are empowered because they are politicised. And to be politicised is to be made aware that collective endeavours offer possibilities of self-realisation. To be politicised is to be made aware of the rights that accrue to every human being by virtue of being human. It means that people who have been constituted as subjects and not as citizens by the policies of the state rise to demand justice, equality, and freedom; to demand that the state delivers what it has promised in theory. Political activity simply makes for aware and self-confident human beings, because these human beings acquire agency in and through politics. And thus ordinary men and women make the transition from subject to citizen.

It is precisely this version of politics that is at a discount when different agencies involved in administration or management hijack political initiatives and once again constitute human beings as subjects of political thinking thought elsewhere, or worse when they constitute individuals as consumers of services rendered. For we must ask this uncomfortable question of even the most well-meaning of these groups: who was consulted in the forging of agendas? When? And how were the local people consulted, through what procedures and through what modalities? Were they consulted at all? Do in short, partners in governance represent people and their needs? Or are they managing people who do not have even a remote chance of influencing their agendas? And when we consider the somewhat formidable range of activities that have been taken up by the various agencies involved in governance, our doubts intensify. For now they dictate what kind of development should be given to particularly the people of the ‘third world’, what kind of education they should receive, what kind of democracy should be institutionalised, what rights they should demand and possess, and what they should do to be empowered.

We have cause to worry. For what we see is the collapse of the idea that ordinary men and women are capable of appropriating the political initiative. What we see is the appropriation of local and political agendas in favour of the agenda of the specific group whether it be a chamber of commerce or a traders’ association. It is in short unclear whether the organisations involved in governance strengthen or weaken the role of the democratic community for the following reasons. One, managerial activism is no substitute for self-determining and empowering action born out of specific experiences. Secondly, even if agencies step into deliver basic services such as water, food, health, and education, are these efforts meant to make the community self-reliant, or are they meant to reproduce the conditions that demand sustained intervention by this sector itself? Concerned observers tell us that since the leadership of, for example, voluntary organisations consists of a highly skilled and professional class, it is this very class that seeks to reproduce the conditions of its own existence and usefulness. Communities may be just fated to indefinite dependence if not on the state then on the voluntary sector.

Further, we may well find that in the process the non-performing state in particularly third world countries has been rescued. Out of a large number of voluntary agencies that have emerged as service deliverers, some are independent, others experiment with a range of new options, and most have been subcontracted by the state. Now consider that at the very moment when the state in the third world was being pilloried for non-delivery, and when it was being castigated by political activists as corrupt, non-performing, and non-responsive, these agencies entered the scene to bail it out by subcontracting for it. Even when the state does not mandate such subcontracting, donor agencies, or the World Bank authorises them to do so. In the process, voluntary and market agencies have not only rescued and perhaps legitimised the non-performing state, they have neutralised political discontent by stepping in to do what the state is expected to do in the social sector.

In sum skilled professionals not only save the state from being accountable, they are not accountable to the people themselves. And they create and foster structures of dependency upon bodies that deliver services, rather than encourage the growth of political awareness. But if people are galvanised to demand services rather than mobilised against abuses of power, they may lose political rights altogether. Agencies involved in governance can therefore render otherwise self-confident citizens dependent and helpless as well as neutralise challenges to the political order. Instead of self-confident citizens who are aware of their rights and who demand fulfilment of their basic entitlements, we may well find that people have been constituted as consumers of services. We may well discover that civil society has lost its potential for democracy because it has been depoliticised.

The third issue that is of some concern is the following. Even when governance involved notions of democratic control in the form of local self-government for instance, can these organisations function democratically in societies that are deeply ingalitarian? Political struggles in the early 20th century in Europe and in the mid-20th century in the countries of Asia had established that formal democratic procedures are of little use for people who are snared in structures that are profoundly unequal. It is for these precise reasons that political thinking had moved from political and civil rights to social and economic rights on the one hand and the welfare state that diminishes inequality on the other. Does the same sense inform democratic thinking today? Perhaps not, perhaps governance has once again thinned out democracy by conceptualising it in purely procedural terms.

Take the case of Nuangon, which is a remote village of the Angul district of the state of Orissa in India. According to a
scheme launched by an NGO and the World Bank, sharing of common water resources was to be decided by a pani panchayat or water-sharers’ association. Membership of the pani panchayat was secured by paying Rs 10.42. The Aunli irrigation project in the Angul district had accordingly set up four water-users associations. These associations, which covered eight villages, took control of the use of canal water. 77 per cent of the 1,700 farmers in the area are members of the panchayat, and women have been empowered to take major decisions. This is certainly a positive development because it democratically involves people in deciding on the distribution of common resources.

Yet it is also a fact that given the highly inequitable distribution of land, out of the 1,700 farmers in the region, a few who own over a hundred acres of land have cornered the gains that accrue from the distribution of water. For one, since officials of the associations are not popularly elected, and since appointments are made by consensus, big landlords inevitably control the pani panchayats. Consider that the son of the largest land-owning family which owns 140 acres of land in the area, is not only the chairperson of the apex committee of the pani panchayats, he is a member of all four water-users association because he pays Rs 40 as membership charges. He therefore has the right to vote in all four associations.

This has borne expected consequences. For even though the sharing of water has been designed according to formal democratic norms, inattention to what we may call background inequalities has resulted in a strange anomaly. Control over water, which is a common resource, has passed out of the hands of small farmers and into the hands of large landowners. For instance the pani panchayat decided that since the inflow of water is less during the rabi season, farmers on one side of the river were to get water out of the seven canals that serve the eight villages, once in two years. The same principle applied to farmers on the other side of the river. In short, farmers were to get water once in alternate years during the rabi season. Therefore, they can now grow the rabi crop only in one out of two years.

At precisely this point of the narration we find a twist in the tale. For since big farmers have land on both sides of the river they will naturally get access to water every year. This note is a decision that has been taken by a democratic organisation and no one can object to either its legitimacy or its validity. But since the processes of formal democracy are completely indifferent to background inequalities, the outcome of a democratic procedure has been profoundly undemocratic. In effect water, which is a common resource has been turned into private property.

The message is simple. Formal procedures of democracy can actually intensify inequalities, if these background inequalities are not taken into account when designing fair procedures. And if governance stresses on the processual rather than on the outcome of democratic practices, some citizens will continue to be disenfranchised despite the best intentions of those who designed governance for faster, efficient, and responsive delivery.

**Conclusion**

In sum, we will now have to rethink our basic precept of democracy and democratic citizenship. We will have to rethink them, because now neither democracy nor democratic citizenship has a primary locus, or a single conception of a demos. For the state now shares power with sub-national governments, with proliferating forms of network and partnership organisations, with a variety of quasi-public and private organisations, with NGOs and with international agencies and other forms of supranational governance. The state has been pluralised. What remains of the significance or meaning of the liberal democratic notion of the state as the undisputed centre of political aspirations and its task of pursuing the collective interest when it itself has been enmeshed in a number of organisations? How do we democratisse bodies that are out of the reach of representation? How do we ensure that democratic procedures take into account background inequalities? Governance in other words has thrown up major challenges for the liberal democratic project, and we need to think this through. Or should we raise new questions for the project of governance itself? This is the question.

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**Notes**

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1. It is only recently that some scholars have begun to ask this question; see the collection of essays in Jon Pierre (ed) Debating Governance: Authority, Steering, and Democracy, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001.
2. Along with many theorists of democracy make a distinction between formal or electoral and substantive democracy, the former is certainly a precondition for the latter, but by itself it, I consider, is inadequate.
3. Whereas earlier theorists of natural rights such as Hobbes and Locke engaged in powerful philosophical arguments to defend the idea of rights, modern theorists, pace John Rawls, take the idea of rights as more or less given.
4. This is not to say that the statement that individuals have rights independently of whether they are or are not recognised by the state is not political. For the purpose of this particular argument, I see rights as becoming politically relevant when they are recognised by states as moral constraints upon their own power.
5. This is precisely what consent theories are about.
6. Whereas the idea of natural rights is not compromised if states do not accept them, the translation of these moral rights into legal norms is certainly dependent upon the willingness of the state to do so. Democratic states codify these rights; non-democratic states fail to do so.
7. Chronologically it was the Soviet Union that first institutionalised this model of the interventionist state.
8. Of course the idea and the practices of class conflict were to emerge at the end of the 19th century in a sharp form. But they were to acquire dominance in politics by the beginning of the next century for a variety of reasons, ranging from class struggles in Europe to the revolution in Russia.
11. By the end of the first war Henry Ford had put into place a system of mass production for mass consumption in the shape of the Model T car, which was produced in one colour that is black. He had systemised Fredrik Taylor’s management techniques in the form of assembly line production, and he had introduced several novel ways of managing both the work time and the home life of his workers. The newly designed River Rouge car plant
near Detroit, where all these features were institutionalised, became a symbol of modern ways of production. In this plant, ‘iron ore and coal were fed into a steel mill at one end of this vast complex, and finished automobiles rolled out on the other’. M. Piore, and C. Sabel, The Second Industrial Divide, Basic Books, New York, p 63.

12 One of the characteristics of early modern factory organisation was that knowledge over gun making or metal smelting was controlled by skilled crafts workers, who would enter into a contract with manufacturing units for supply of components. Crafts workers were thus in a position to bargain with early industrialists via the contract. In turn craftsmen contracted out to skilled or semi-skilled workers. This really meant that whereas capital was in the hands of the industrialists, knowledge continued to be monopolised by the crafts guilds. Factory owners and managers naturally sought to wrest this knowledge away from skilled workers and craftsmen and vest it in a managerial class. Henceforth a worker would only be involved in the production of a specific component, and s/he lost control over the conceptualisation of the commodity.


14 Notions of a common dining room and one uniform marked management relations in the Maruti car manufacturing factory in Gurgoan, India. However, in late 2000, the workers of the factory went on strike against the demand of the management that the workers sign an undertaking that they would not engage in any activity that may adversely affect production and discipline. Those workers who do not sign, warned the management, would not be allowed to enter the factory, and will be deemed to be on illegal strike. Note the use of the term ‘discipline’. The use of this word makes it quite clear that the notion of shared norms collapse when it comes to the interests of the managers and the proprietors. The main body of the workers refused to sign such an undertaking, accordingly the production of about 1,500 vehicles per day was jeopardised. And this in a company that once under the influence of Japanese business methods had delivered 140 per cent productivity. The course of generating trust through a common uniform and one canteen had obviously run its full course. The limits of a strategy that contains class conflict is more than obvious.

15 The contribution of East Asia and ideas of Confucianism have proved vital for this shift. I am thinking of the Hegelian formulation on the state.

16 I think of for instance track one and track two diplomacy in many countries, particularly India, when it comes to India-Pakistan relations.


19 Completely indifferent to the human aspects of the problem, neo-liberal ideas brought with them the suggestion that the crisis of the welfare state could be alleviated by the adoption of a firm monetaristic economic policy coupled with deregulation, privatisation, drastic reduction in the state sector, and a profound institutional restructuring of the state. Restructuring of the state implied the creation of semi-autonomous agencies to replace governmental centralised command and control functions. It implied, to put it bluntly, the trimming down of state power to create a minimalist state and the subcontracting of state functions to other agencies. The brief honeymoon with statism was over and the state has been restructured in ways that have deprived it of its traditional sources of power, policy capacity, institutional capabilities, and legitimacy.

20 Keynes had argued that products may not find buyers because the market suffers from a systemic problem. It cannot assure adequate purchasing power, it fails to bring together wants and means, and it under-utilises society’s productive capacity. Therefore the state should regulate the market. The defenders of welfarism and Marxists on the other hand held that the market is completely indifferent to the inability of some groups of people to either buy or sell, therefore, the state should intervene to see that all people are in possession of purchasing power.


23 The post-Washington consensus was to focus on three issues. First, globalisation was too important to be left to the unrestricted corporate world and should be mediated through ‘governance’ that ensured transparency, accountability, capacity building, and safety networks. Second, the state needed to be replaced not so much by the market as by civil society organisations that represented the aspirations of the people and that strengthened democracy. This of course meant that the fields of the market and of non-market transactions were, in policy prescriptions, separated. Third, the new consensus opined that only a strong civil society under the guidance of NGOs can further democracy. Note, however, that this avatar of civil society is not marked by democratic contestation but by the building of ‘social capital’ and ‘trust’ among the inhabitants. In effect, the earlier move away from the state to the market has now been replaced by a move away from the state to civil society based on networks of trust.

24 For a commitment to lessening of poverty is not the same as a commitment to equality. The poor may be protected through the erection of safety nets, but the rich continue to be affluent. This kind of thinking can be called humanitarianism rather than egalitarian simply because egalitarianism presupposes a relation between degrees of affluence and poverty.

25 I have italicised the state because it is unclear whether the same norms of good governance apply to other organisations that network with the state.

26 This strain of thinking of course has been critiqued by many theorists. I have for instance argued in my 1995 State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory, Sage, Delhi, that whereas the state and civil society can be distinguished analytically, they are related organically, with the state condensing the struggles in civil society over the notions of politics.

27 Koizumi and Van Vliet identify the following tasks for the state: composition and coordination; collaboration and steering; integration and regulation. See J Koizumi, and M Van Vliet, ‘Governance and Public Management’ in K Eliassen and J Koizumi (eds) Managing Public Organisations, Sage, London, p 66. This however, does not make it clear whether the division of tasks is without tensions and whether the entire system will not lapse into a vast and unresolvable problem of dominant and subordinate.


29 Of course what wins out and what loses depends on the general profile of politics. That goes on in a given society. The state enables radical or conservative politics, whether it enables the breaking of boundaries or the restoration of boundaries, whether it enables the articulation of the agendas of the marginalised or whether it allows for the articulation of the agendas of the preferred classes. Alternatively, it is conceivable that feminist politics challenges and rearranges the boundaries of the wider polity, and that it rearranges agendas in ways that brings more democracy to the polity.


31 Ibid, p 87.


37 I am by no means suggesting that politics is a purely local activity, it is and should be national and international. However, since NGOs tend to focus on the local, I employ the term local politics to denote popular initiatives that are concerned with a limited segment of immediate space, such as water conservation, or ecology, or development.

38 I use the concept of community purely in spatial terms, as a group of people inhabiting a territorially delineated space.


