

# **The 'Nehruvian' State, Government, and the Developmental Imagination**

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This project explores the continuities and changes in the imagining and governing of the new Indian state in the period before and after formal independence, in particular through an examination of the developmental imagination that became central to the identity and legitimation of the independent Indian state. It explores the tensions and continuities between a colonial model of the state (something that requires further exploration in the historical and political science literature) and a national model, focusing on questions of legitimation as well as to actual practices of governance.

This work pays close attention to the uses of nationalism (a claim to the congruence of state and nation) to legitimate the state (the monopoly of legitimate violence). Although the 'Nehruvian model' of Indian nationalism became the officially proclaimed version, it is doubtful that it was ever properly hegemonic. And the question of why it was not hegemonic, and yet remained the version that was most useful to which to publicly proclaim allegiance once again raises questions about the importance of languages of legitimation in a political order: what does it enable? What does it rule out? What manoeuvres, ideological and political, does it necessitate or obviate?

State-led developmentalism has been considered preferable to a dangerous, potentially or actually exclusionary 'cultural nationalism', where 'culture' stands for sectional interests, usually of a majoritarian nature. A developmental 'nationalism' is allegedly more progressive than a 'cultural' one, because it is a version of inclusive civic belonging rather than of ethnic belonging and its concomitant exclusions. The (nation-) state is legitimised and naturalised by the state claiming to be the nation through a project of collective 'development', in which the 'people' are allegedly the ultimate beneficiaries, and whose role it is to support the state's leadership. Meanwhile, a commitment to the nation-state is underpinned by the fact that 'development' takes place within the claimed geographical boundaries of that state. This collective movement towards a common goal allegedly obviates the need for close definitions of belonging and non-belonging to the 'nation': definitions can be by-passed, therefore 'culture', 'ethnies', or various other more exclusionary ways of imagining the nation, remain less of an issue. If we are speaking here of inclusive civic belonging, everyone within the borders belongs to the state, regardless of caste, creed or religion. Exclusions are not civic but economic; whether this is preferable is debatable.

This model has problematic implications for formal democracy. The 'masses' would be told what to do for the good of the (nation-)state, which was also (in the long run?) for their own good. If, as Nehru admitted privately, it was Hindu sectarian opinion that was in the ascendant in the period leading to and immediately after independence, he would ensure that this tendency had no access to legitimate political arenas. The 'Nehruvians', and Nehru in particular, were adept at manoeuvring languages of legitimacy so that, in the context both of the Indian anti-colonial struggle led by the Indian National Congress that had always claimed to be non-sectarian, and of the post-independence period, where ethnocentric sectarianisms stood temporarily discredited in the public domain (not least after the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu), a Hindu chauvinist nationalism had limited access to the language of public legitimation. Thus, the 'cultural' in the 'national' was sought to be suppressed by a form of state-led developmentalism that claimed some basis in internationalist, or at least less than nationalist, thought. But this was always very unstable.