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State in India, Pakistan, Russia and Central Asia

By

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The book under review deals with the four significant case studies of post-communist and developing states in historical, theoretical and empirical dimensions. The focus is to examine their nature from the viewpoint of regime types and class essence. The centrality of the state in a third world country, cannot be minimised. This centrality recognises role of the state as a protector. The relevance of state for the purpose of protection and development cannot be denied. It has had a vital presence. What is the relationship between the state and civil society? How is one mobilised in the cause of the other? Is it possible to look at the state as an agency of modernisation and democracy? Is there a contradiction between the modernising desires of civil society and the democratic imperatives of the state? The study seeks to find answers to these and similar questions.

The volume is divided into four equal parts. The first chapter dealing with India analyses the state-society relationship in feudal and late feudal India. It shows the dominance of the state in terms of social transformation and autonomy of various social institutions. During the height of the feudal and the pre-colonial state, the institution of state remained central to economic and societal processes. In the colonial state this happened with a dose of racism and exploitation. In the post-independence period that centrality, continues for the purpose of development. After independence the most significant achievement was the creation of viable structure of the nation state. The state in India as enjoined by the constitution has to bring about justice. It has to cater to the callings of different segments of society who may be at different stages of historical development in an unevenly developed economy, polity and consciousness. The crucial legitimising principle for state intervention in a wide range of economic and social spheres was provided by the ideology of development. The key role of the state filled an institutional vacuum. The combined effects of the activities of the developmental state and the nationalisation carried out throughout the democratic political process was a rapid widening and deepening of the reach of the state into society. Jawaharlal Nehru laid the institutional and ideological basis for the penetration of the nation state into spheres of social activity and into the lives of virtually all sections of the people of India. The liberal state in India has evolved from being a facilitator to regulator and interventionist. Its status as a democratic polity is in sharp contrast to all the other cases.

The next chapter discusses Pakistan at length. Ever since 1947, Pakistan has been plagued by the issues of provincial autonomy sectarian strife, military coup d'états and endless polemics over power sharing between Punjab and the smaller provinces. The never-ending phenomenon of Islam which could have been definitely resolved with the establishment of the state, keeps

surfacing as the process of Islamisation which spawns further fragmentation. The chapter examines the state of Pakistan from the perspective of regime types to lay bare the distorted dynamics of democracy. It looks at the nature of political turmoil that Pakistan has faced in the process of its history. Even after five decades of its creation, Pakistan is struggling to establish a viable political system. Democracy and democratic institutions have yet to take roots. Long spells of military rule and even longer period of religious, ethnic and economic turmoil have battered its polity. The state of Pakistan has also been described as a failed state. The chapter dealing with Russia looks at the issue of identity. What is happening in terms of formation of civil society? How is it relevant for identity in terms of current politics? What is the strength of political processes given old and new processes of modernisation? Is new patrimonial society subsumed or transcended? The characterization of the Russian state cannot be democratic. In the ultimate analysis the system is no where near a liberal one or a capitalist one. The ontos of Russian state belies the earlier hopes of liberal democracy and capitalist economy. Its plutocracy and political institutions have hardly held any promise of economic stability, political democracy, national unity and viable state. Russia is in search of its identity. It has anarcho-capitalism. Democratic institution-alism is weak and the state is authoritarian under a plutocracy and a market. Last chapter dealing with Central Asia reveals that the region is witnessing of phase of weak states and weak societies in an unprecedented process of transition. What has happened is the new states have become authoritarian and there is personality cult. There is a discernible pattern that emerges for the former Soviet Central Asia in the post communist phase in terms of the nature of the elites, nature of the state and pattern of political process. The region, like Pakistan case, lacks nationalism for different reasons. The Soviet policies of developing the idea of a soviet man and secular identities submerged identity formation in ethnic terms. Speaking relatively state in India stands taller than Russia, peripheral Central Asia and authoritarian Pakistan. The book is scholarly and timely. It must be found interesting and useful both by scholars and the ordinary readers.