Neo-Liberal Strategies of Governing India

Ranabir Samaddar

A Routledge India Original

Neo-Liberal Strategies of Governing India

Neo-Liberal Strategies of Governing India and its companion volume *Ideas and Frameworks of Governing India* tell the story of governance in independent India and address the critical question: how is a post-colonial democracy governed? Further, they attempt to understand why the process of governing a post-colonial democracy, particularly in the neo-liberal age, should be studied as the central question within the history of post-colonial democracy. The volumes offer hitherto unexplored analyses of governance – political and ideological aspects along with technological characteristics – in a historical framework.

This volume discusses:

- a contemporary history of democracy – ways of governing, resistance and their engagement
- political economy, development and neo-liberal governance
- governance as a strategy of accommodating claims and facilitating accumulation.

In breaking new ground in the study of what constitutes the political subject, these volumes will be indispensable to scholars, researchers and students of politics, public administration, development studies, South Asian studies and modern India.

Ranabir Samaddar is the Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies at Calcutta Research Group, India. Among foremost critical theorists, he has worked extensively on issues of forced migration, dialogue, nationalism and post-colonial statehood in South Asia, and new regimes of technological restructuring and labour control. His significant interventions on justice, rights, peace, nation-state and critical post-colonial thought include *The Politics of Dialogue* (2004), *The Materiality of Politics* (2007) and *The Emergence of the Political Subject* (2009). His co-authored work *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination* (2013) examines new town and accumulation in the context of urban post-colonial capitalism. His co-edited volumes include *Political Transition and Development Imperatives in India* (2012), *New Subjects and New Governance in India* (2012) and *Conflict, Power, and the Landscape of Constitutionalism* (2008).

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ROUTLEDGE
Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book.

ISBN: 978-1-138-67470-7 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-56090-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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Preface

This companion volume is written in the framework of a contemporary history of democracy. The history of democracy is a history of particular ways of governing, ways of resistance and the dynamics of the interface of the two. This is the reason that this book written predominantly as a contemporary account of governing India is, to a large measure, also an account of post-colonial political democracy in the neo-liberal time. This is perhaps true of all democracies – only that in the countries of the capitalist West, they mostly do not recognize it and see it as one of enlightened governance marked by guarantee of rights, private property and market institutions, while here in India as in many other post-colonial countries, we openly acknowledge that the story of democracy is one of power, domination, representation, conflict, resistance and popular claim-makings, because nothing explains why things happen in India in the way they do without reference to popular politics and without an understanding of how capitalism has developed in post-colonial conditions. This book adopts such a critical view.

In this book the history of governing is seen therefore as consisting of two principal elements: (a) the mutually constitutive relationship between rulers and the ruled based on norms, rules, rights and popular claims; and (b) governance as a strategy of creating conditions of accumulation and providing the institutional matrix of these conditions. If attention to the need for a historical framework for the study of governance is a feature of the book, its other feature, as mentioned earlier, is attention to political economy, which has now assumed greater significance in the wake of globalization and the rise of corporate financial power. From the point of theory, attention to political economy is important because this will throw light on the contemporary swing of the process of governance from politics to economics.

The problematic of governance was earlier around the question of democracy. Today the problematic of governance is not only how to make the society market-friendly but also to enable various sections of society to become actors in the market. Therefore, the problematic of governance is also around the constant need of the rulers to determine the ratio between violence and rational administration as the core of managing the market-driven operations of society. Government of society becomes possible only through government of economy. Development becomes the code word for government of economy. In such a situation the question of self with which the other volume began should vex us, namely if as our anti-colonial thinkers imagined that independence and freedom is self-governance, what happens then under this type of governance to the government of the self? To the extent the self can be governed through techniques of self-government, can we then assume that in order to make the self appropriate for governance of society the task of governance is to make the self nothing less than resilient in the face of the vicissitudes of development and the post-colonial existence as a whole? Also, is this the way that capitalism functions in this neo-liberal age? We can think ahead little more and ask: is the story of gradual reform by which capital advances and known in Marxist literature as passive revolution the general story of democracy? Is the post-colonial story of governance and democracy today the general one? The last chapter turns to this enquiry.

One can, of course, argue that with the critical shift in late seventies and early eighties of the past century in style of governance, modes of popular politics and nature of democracy, the significance of the anti-colonial ethos of radical democracy has waned; governmental tools have transformed beyond recognition; there is a specific regime of governmentality based on incorporation of popular demands in official language of governance and that citizens have become objects of governance. There is some truth in this observation. Yet in these two companion volumes we have tried to argue that the politics of autonomy, claim-making, newer ways of making democracy immediate and urgent and popular dialogues have revived from time to time the contentious spirit of Indian democracy and challenged the official narrative of governance. Our contention has been that from the nineties of the last century and certainly from the beginning of the last decade, popular claim-makings have acquired a new spirit, re-awakening in the process hope for a politics of radical democracy. Some of the chapters in Part I of this volume deal with this theme and the possibilities of such an emergence. The double register and the double speak of post-colonial governance, the modes of expression of popular

anger, parliamentarianism, the culture of chamber confabulations as a substitute of dialogues with the people, the urge for direct, immediate democracy, democracy here and now and the secular trend of transforming the citizens into subjects through the governmental process all emerged in the last two decades.

This happened repeatedly in the subsequent years. Elections and extension of representative system, however, made the periodic collapse of representation look like the science of administration equally orderly. Thus, when in the decade of the nineties, the disconnection between politics and the science of administration became evident with governance collapsing, the collapse became the occasion for reform. Collapse and reform became the life of an incomplete nation forever trying to complete itself.

The Administrative Reforms Commission Reports are the best evidence of the disconnect I am speaking of. The suggested models of behaviour, frameworks of attitudes and gestures of government towards the people – all unattainable for the most part – have produced a kind of governing tradition, which is in stark contrast with the precarious, tumultuous life of those being governed. While post-colonial capitalism henceforth will unsettle the life of the people more and more, post-colonial governance will appear as traditional, classic and solid. The more political contradictions became acute, the more the leaders of government exhorted that governance was not about ruling people – it was an attitude towards society, a responsibility, a particular setup for development, a way of being and not a doctrine and certainly not an index of rules and regulations. This paradox or duality as we try to show in this book has not only produced a history of forms, modes and styles of popular politics but also made post-colonial democracy a victim to an irreducible inner contradiction.

In a sense let us then revise a little our claim of what these two volumes are. If the earlier accounts of governance banished history from them, the purpose here is not exactly to restore history to the affairs of governing. The aim is to provide a historical analysis of post-colonial procedures of governance as procedures of domination, neo-liberal accumulation and replacing the history of subjectivity (of which probably the most celebrated example would be the Subaltern Studies writings on history) with an analysis of the pragmatics of self-governance, replacing at the same time a theory of post-colonial politics with a matrix of experiences. That is why these two volumes – and this companion volume in particular – are perched on a meeting of two sets: chronological descriptions and categories of experiences marked with interruptions, such as experiences of disorders, making claims,

dialogues, defeats, encounters, citizenship, becoming rule bound, new forms of exploitation, migration, flight and enunciating new forms of justice. Experiences have been the focal points of governance. Though awkwardly combined, these two sets do tell us the fundamental problem of post-colonial governance: should it be a government of enlightened rulers like Nehru, Vajpayee and others like them (recall therefore the letters written by Nehru to the chief minsters discussed in one of the chapters of this book), assisted by an equally enlightened set of advisers and counsels or an unstable reign of multiple claims to political truth continuously adjusting their mutual positions to co-exist? In such a situation, governance more than anything else has become the dominating discourse of modernity. What will be its nature? Will it be an enlightened rule as of the virtuous Asoka or a benevolent but strict imperial rule as of Akbar, rule through unstable alliances or the rule of the knowledgeable and wealthy from the outside as of the colonial time who can train us in ruling efficiently and productively? In any case guidance will be needed. Self-rule must be tempered with guidance.

Yet the massive reception with which each change of government at the centre is declared after some general election, notwithstanding the fact that people know that such change mostly means nothing in terms of their conditions of life, shows how this implicit consensus among the ruling groups about guiding the people with enlightened governance is treated with derision by the latter. Those who give too much advice to the subjects thinking all the time that they were doing right will fall. They will pay the price of illusion. Not the reasonable god, but the oracular god of elections will punish the ruler.

The dilemma of post-colonial governance therefore is: how much to allow unpalatable claims to political truths, that is free speech, and how much to rely on the advice of the enlightened counsels so that the rulers can govern effectively? We can see that the idea of the republic announced finally in 1950 is not at all virtuous, but permeated with imperial and princely spirit of enlightened rule, education, guidance, sternness and rectitude of the republic finally arrives at an uneasy compromise. Yet the confrontation between the citizen who wants to speak out and the enlightened ruler continues. The possibilities of radical democracy in India hinge on this encounter, also the sense radical democracy makes of this encounter. The outcome of post-colonial political democracy thus depends on the encounter of democracy and rules of governance.

As we argue in the concluding chapter, this question in time, along with all other contradictions, will become acute in the wake of neo-liberal globalization, as the country in time will be more urbanized

and the focal point of governance shifts to the city, because the city will symbolize the process of accumulation by extraction. Therefore governance most of the time will have to break its head on what is an ideal city? How is the city to be governed? From the early nineties of the preceding century, the urban question in this way will become the core of governance. Cities will become the new sites of extraction, accumulation and governance.

All these contradictions are now sharpened. First to note, of course, is the increasing importance of the city, as referred to briefly in the preceding paragraph, in governing the country in the past twenty odd years. As the city becomes the new site of extraction (we can consider the government's urbanization policy in the wake of the spectacular rise in rent in big cities and the changes in the land-use pattern in a city) besides the old sites of extraction like mines and forests, not only the old city changes but new towns also emerge. The new cities become the test sites of public-private partnerships (PPPs). At the same time the city becomes the contested ground for different claims. Contrary to what the cultural theorists of the city say, the city is not a contact zone, but a battle zone for opposing strata and classes of population. Particularly significant is the degree to which the migrant question becomes significant in the official discourse of city management. Immigrant labour in cities like Mumbai or Delhi or other big cities is a permanent alien with no citizenship rights and no participatory claim, and the city administration is content with providing them with at best some welfare services and at worst expelling them from the cities in periodic outbursts of frenzy. In such a milieu, the city is a void, the void of an institutional place where determinations of class, gender, caste and region all are superimposed. This void of an appropriate political structure of representation on one hand encourages the urban authorities to criminalize, marginalize and disqualify immigrant labour from urban politics and city life in general, and on the other hand sets the city as a theatre of permanent discontent, gang warfare, unrest and periodic revolt. The void also encourages the rival claims to clash with each other fiercely. Migrants are the internal foreigners. They signify the failure of representation. They show that the republic is not virtuous; it is a void filled up by only images of old quartered towns, whose genealogy tells us the story of ethnic imprisonment. To the immigrant labour in the city, the republic represents not citizenship, but a police planet. Not without reason, reforming the city and making it suitable for extraction (of land, physical capacity and energy, air, water, e-waste and other waste material) become the heart of logistical governance. Urban reform is the core of modern passive revolution. The city is

not politics or the site of citizenship. It is now only a point in a corridor. It is a special kind of zone, a link to be connected to an airport (instead of the other way round) or a port or a high way; it is only a hub of traffic of different kinds such as money, information, commerce or inter-modal transportation. Migrants are a necessary evil for such logistical space. They cannot be made completely invisible. But they can and must be quartered.

What will this transformation of governance signal for political philosophy? What will it hold for classical categories like rights and obligations, legitimacy, legislation, sovereignty, responsibility, community, republicanism and freedom, for which political philosophy has been exercised through ages? The post-colonial condition in any sense diminishes the scope of these categories. But I am indicating here the effect of the transformation of governance in a deeper sense. Marx in his observations on the Paris Commune had indicated the power of financial oligarchy over democracy and had said that the republic was the most convenient form of bourgeois rule.[1] Democracy would be not only sucked in its own legend but finally destroyed under the burden of its own myth. Political philosophy has no answer to such condition, whose mark is the presence of all that cannot be represented. On one hand, neo-liberal governance has to ensure that all the supposed 'stakeholders' are included in the process; on the other hand, it has to ensure that they are included only as market players with differential capacities and with no dissatisfaction, envy or anger. In such conditions when the politics of representation is impossible or conventional politics after a limit is impossible, democracy becomes the limit figure of politics. Democracy to use a Derridean phrase is then always 'to come'. It is the ever-possible alternative, the other scene of governance. Citizenship in that other scene appears as always an infinite access to our claims for justice.

Therefore it will not be wrong to say that the main implication of the arguments of this book is that even in the period of passive revolution the possibility of radical democracy does not lie outside the ensemble of what we call politics, but is firmly within it. That possibility is, what Marx would have called, the immanent reflexivity of the 'thing itself' – an extremely conflictive process of realization of autonomy and self-governance, of labour's own politics. The collective appropriation of politics is the response to the regime of governmentality that rules India today.

From this angle we do not find much utility in making hair thin differences between governance, governmentality, government, governing and so on. Much to the consternation of the purists, in these two

volumes these words have been used at times interchangeably, though we are aware of the specific intonation of each word and the need to keep them distinct. For us it was important to see in the light of politics (specifically in the light of the politics of resistance) governance, which is the current regime of governmentality, also the nature of government, and the way country is governed. It is important to see what is being resisted, how does the technique of governing aim to suck this resistance into the whirlpool of governmentality and what it means for post-colonial democracy.

Let me end with one instance. On 15 August 2014 the prime minister of India announced the abolition of the Planning Commission, possibly also the planning process. If this announcement caught many by surprise, this was to come given the policy explosion the country witnessed in the last decade and a half, which we discuss in the first section of this book. It is important to see the interface of the two processes in the context of neo-liberal governance – the receding process of planning and the resurgent process of policy exercise. Planning with all its defects, particularly when drawn to extreme, is finally social intervention in the process of economy. Planning encourages planning from below, planning from different angles and planning is dialogue in the process of deliberations over the conduct of economy. Planning is based on conservation of resources and advancing from a base. Planning has consistency, even though priorities may change from one plan to another. The switch from planning to policy takes place when the planners are first co-opted in the policy process. Policy makers tell the planners, you could not anticipate the crisis; you cannot make risk a constant external factor in your exercise of guiding the economy. You cannot see the advantage of debt because you do not appreciate that debt brings credit. In this way, planning is sabotaged till it becomes part of the policy apparatus and exhausted from within to be finally abolished.

What does policy-based governance say? Government has to be ever alert to the risks of the world. Therefore, the policy tool with its in-built flexibility, non-accountability and target-oriented approach invents a new form of command. Policy vision looks for opportune areas of social reproduction in order to reap windfalls so much so that it changes priority in a moment. It glimpses the value of social reproduction and control of the means of social reproduction by transforming them into productive elements of society within a framework of formal market economy and industrialization, such as food, water, education, sex, health and care. This can be done through gaining direct access to and controlling the informal experiments with social reproduction of life, which

are that level raw, in other words, based on extractive modes. In this financially and climatologically unstable world, risk is an external factor that governance has to take as constant factor. But it takes it so in a way that working against risk can yield dividends without end. This is because policy is a form of opportunity-seeking governance that embraces drastically the extra-economic or the political character of command today. It transforms the entire field of governance as one of contingency. It is willing to be contingent and make others contingent. It thus does not, as many critics think, set up one against many. Its vision is to break up the many to fix it in a new assemblage.

Such governance works only when we work, and we work to invest our interests in the game of debt, consumption and credit. Governance thereby gains new senses into the world of bad debt, new interests and new credit. It does not therefore seek new citizenship. It seeks ways to make the country profitable by engaging with the debt/credit game. It becomes logistical governance of supply of money, credit, services and goods. Governance is a way by which India is governed.

Does this mean that politics is finally put to a stop before the march of governance? In the last chapter I have referred to populism as a product of, yet a counterpoint to, governance. If we take rhetoric as the heart of elections and our electoral democracy, governance increasingly will try to distance itself from rhetoric. Rhetoric is democracy; governance is enlightened rule. Rhetoric is manipulation whose nature is independent of the object to be manipulated; governance is philosophy. It concerns knowledge, specialized knowledge. This specialized knowledge will also include the knowledge of how to make the citizen participate in governing – thus all the managerial sciences of stakeholders, participatory governance, mechanisms of public litigation, public appeals and public hearing, the science of constituting a specific public that understands, discusses and approves of the rule of the enlightened. This dialectic of rhetoric and science of governance constitutes the restive exterior to post-colonial political democracy. This explains to a large extent the way the three sections have been organized in this book.

To sum up: through these two volumes I have indicated two phases in the history of governing India with their continuities and discontinuities – first, the post-colonial liberal phase taking off from the decade of forties in the past century and, second, the neo-liberal phase beginning in right earnest from the beginning of the nineties. This is not therefore a seamless story of political democracy in India, but one with many fissures, joints and cracks. And to repeat, this book is on governing India and not on governance, though we cannot be

sure that purists will spare us for avoiding a thick jungle of concepts by what they will perceive as sleight of words.

Note

1 *Third Address* of May 1871, *The Civil War in France*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/index.htm (accessed on 2 December 2015).

Acknowledgements

This book *Neo-liberal Strategies of Governing India* views Indian governance as a policy house for capital accumulation and neo-liberal restructuring of the country. It is a companion volume to the previous one, *Ideas of Frameworks of Governing India*. The original idea of the author was to produce a single book on Indian governance as response to the crucial question: how is India governed? The author, however, has deferred to the editorial advice of Routledge to split the original plan of a single volume into two. These two volumes now come out as two separate but companion volumes on Indian governance. The editorial advice compelled the author to think with greater rigour about the discontinuities in the post-colonial history of governance in India. This book, while referring to the continuities in the forms and style of governance in the past seventy years, stresses on what is new, still evolving along two planks – the issue of development of the country along a particular neo-liberal path and the way governance is geared up to clear the ground for conditions of accumulation. In the process it also discusses how the government has engaged with rights and popular claims in an effort to pursue its developmental policies – impacting in the process on even such a fundamental democratic institution as the political party. All these represent new features. The author's sincere thanks go in the first place to the two Routledge editors, Shoma Choudhury and Aakash Chakrabarty. Their guidance and advice were valuable.

For the themes specifically discussed here, particular thanks are to Paula Banerjee, Anjuman Ara Begum, Sharit Bhaumik, J. Peter Burgess, Manish Jha, Madhuresh Kumar, Mithilesh Kumar, Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, Prabhu Mahapatra, Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson, Aakash Singh Rathore, Julian Reid, Oliver Richmond, Ned Rossiter and Ravi Srivastava.

Of course, the continuing work at CRG on issues of migration, governance and post-colonial capital accumulation has immensely helped

the writing of this volume. The author wishes to thank all the researchers belonging to the CRG research collective for this.

The chapters of this book were written over a period of the past seven years, together with the chapters of the volume dealing with founding concepts and structures of governance. And as in the previous case, some of the material published earlier in the form of articles in journals or delivered as public lectures or papers written as invitations to edited volumes has been substantially revised, in some cases merged, broken up or amalgamated with other material to become parts of this book. I sincerely record my acknowledgements to journals, institutions and editors whose invitations occasioned these writings. These occasions helped the author to see the evolution of post-colonial governmentality in the context of neo-liberal capitalism. The author has also tried to modulate the discussion in the present context of globalization, wars of conquest, re-division of the world and the surge of protests and struggles for rights and justice against these everywhere, in other words governance as an element of contentious politics. In this sense these two volumes collectively can be seen as an account of democracy in India. For after all is it not true that democracy on one hand is a contentious history of rights and claims and on the other hand a regime of class politics whose goal is to facilitate capitalist accumulation?

3 December 2015
Kolkata

Part I

Rights and development as the site of governance

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1 Governing a recalcitrant minority population

The grammar of government

In the grammar of governance, one of the most important tasks of governing has been managing the minority issue in a majoritarian polity. As an instance, we shall discuss here the issue of governing the largest minority population in the country, the Muslims. Even though there are hundreds of essays and books on minority rights in India, there is a need to examine again the theme of minorities – not in the usual context of rights, but in the context of rule, government and governmental rationality. This text is, of course, not an altogether different story from that of rights; in fact we can say that the two narratives are interwoven, but given the present situation of Indian democracy, it is important to trace the way in which conceding the 'rights of the minorities' becomes one of the modes in which communities are to be ruled and inter-community relations are to be governed. Rights create the space for governing minor groups of society and forming an unequal political society. Governmental thought on this issue evolved in the colonial time and then through the next nearly seventy years after independence. An understanding of this evolution will tell us how sovereignty, law and governmental power interfaced in the actual process of a majoritarian rule.

Issues of sovereignty and legality had been always discussed in traditional political and legal theory. Then in the second half of the twentieth century there were significant historical researches on the origins of governmental power and functions laying bare the historical evolution of these powers and functions. These new researches show how the connection between sovereignty and legality depends on governmental functions and reason. In its function of managing the minorities, governmental reason mediates the presence of sovereignty and legality. This implies three things: (a) supremacy of authority or rule as

exercised by a sovereign or sovereign state; (b) governmental rank, authority or power; and (c) a territory existing as an independent state. Yet, and in fact as a consequence of these three, it implies one more thing: (d) the attraction of the ideas of autonomy and self-government as an exit route for the minor groups trapped in a majoritarian polity.

We can see that this kind of arrangement of power, symbolized by the first three features, is quite a physical scenario. It suggests the rights and powers to command, decide, rule and judge, and therefore to authority, command, control, dominion, jurisdiction, mastery, prerogative and sway. Yet, as if by law of mechanics, these realities suggest for the minor groups of society exactly the opposite, that is, conditions (and the necessity) of being free, namely autonomy, freedom, self-government and, finally, coexistence and dialogue, that is freedom to coexist and dialogue.

Equally significant is the fact that the minority issue in India since its birth hangs between two markers: identity and development. If minor groups are strident about 'identity', and if governmental policies of cultural pluralism (mainly in the form of select cultural rights) fail, then the sovereign power must coerce these minority groups to fall in line. But lest that should result in rebellion, what is required is 'development' of these minor groups and places. This indicates policies for social legislation, social governance and social jurisprudence – in short what we call policies of hegemony. The grammar of government in this way vacillates between the two paths – coercion and hegemony.

The main weakness in this grammar of governing the minorities lies in the difficulty of selecting from this grammar adequate forms of coping with various reactions and responses of the minority groups in society (which are driven, as mentioned at the outset, by the attraction of the ideas of autonomy and self-government of the minor groups) to majoritarian rule. This is because exactly as the minority groups face the problem of the power of the sovereign, the sovereign also faces the power of the minority groups, given the attraction of the latter towards the ideas of autonomy and self-government. This enigmatic thing about the phenomenon of power, as Michel Foucault once described, is that it is 'at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous'[1] and cannot be exhausted by policies of government. What gives power to the minor groups? How do they exercise it and in what sphere/s? Even a government blessed with a reasonable certainty must know: who are the minorities? Who are India's minorities? What do they want? Even though there are mechanisms to enlighten the government on these queries, the government cannot be satisfied with these mechanisms. The anxiety is: do these mechanisms

tell enough what do they want? Therefore, governmental reason oscillates between policies of domination and producing consensus among the minorities on issues of social governance. The persistence of the minority problematic lies in this.

On one hand conquest speaks of race, domination, war, suppression, mutiny, revolt and so on – all these resulted in the formation of minority groups; on the other hand, assimilation, integration, multi-culturalism, differential inclusion and so on speak of policies of managing the minorities who are now born. The power of the sovereign is caught in the paradox of rule and governance. Caught in this paradox, the grammar of rule can be based on neither suppression nor full co-option. Instead it must be based on the practices of governing the minorities. It will mean, henceforth, that the minorities must remain as ineradicable members of the society. They cannot be erased; they cannot be effaced. They must be trained, henceforth, in the art and restraints of representation and imitation. They must not be allowed to make insidious use of the ways they eat, speak, see, marry, lead family life, listen, read, write, get together, pray, make use of their faiths and beliefs and confabulate – the simplest of the acts of existence, which have now become concerns of the government. In the eyes of the government these acts have become significant, potentially dangerous, practices. Their *conduct* must be governed.

Rebellious minority and the colonial perspective

This minority issue was precisely the concern of one of the chief officials of colonial India, W.W. Hunter, who wrote *The Indian Musalmans* (1871), in response to an inquiry mooted by Lord Mayo 'Are the Indian Musalmans bound by their religion to rebel against the Queen?'[2] The context was the Wahabi rebellion and the Great Mutiny of 1857. We must recall here briefly the context of the rebellion and the mutiny to understand how a minor population group was born.

A little more than 160 years ago, between 1830s and 1880s, the colonial authority in India was busy with tracking down the Wahabi rebels particularly after the death of Syed Ahmed Barelvi, the founder of the Wahabi movement in India, in the battlefield at Balakote on the Frontiers on the West on 6 May 1831. Town by town, village conglomerate by village conglomerate and, more important, company garrison by company garrison, the relevant information-gathering, apprehending, jailing, convicting, banishing and, if necessary, killing the rebels went on. Two factors propelled colonial promptness to track down the rebels.

One was the frontier unrest and wars in the Northwest – the ferocious Anglo-Afghan wars and the frontier wars, where the Wahabis threw themselves in wave after wave against the British Indian army, and then as wars on the frontier began, the Wahabis spilled into the mainland of the Subcontinent – following the trail, legacy and links of the earlier Faraizi and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadia* movements. But these were also the years immediately before or after the Great Mutiny of 1857, which had ended with the victory of the colonial power and the imposition of direct rule of the British administration at a huge cost of bloodbath, mass murders, razing of cities and settlements to rubble, brutal pacification and silencing of the towns and the countryside. The rulers were afraid that the Wahabi revolt had contributed to the mutiny and could directly draw further from it, acquire legitimacy and take advantage of the discontent followed as a result of the bloody pacification. The second factor was that the Wahabis were not simply peasant rebels; they were more organized in a network (some say, from Dhaka to Peshawar, and indeed that was the claim of Hunter[3]). The administrations of the three presidency divisions (Calcutta, now Kolkata; Bombay, now Mumbai; and Madras, now Chennai) – the backbone of the formation of colonial administration in those days – had to employ detailed governmental methods of inquiry, reporting, comparing, taking actions on findings and then preparing reports of actions taken for higher authorities with regard to the Wahabis.[4] All in all, the Wahabis remained the classic spectre haunting British India spread over a large region from Patna (at times reaching Kolkata) in the east to Peshawar in the west.[5]

Who were the people flocking to these Wahabi preachings? We can get some idea from government records that contain reports sent by ground officials to their higher ups on Wahabi meetings, such as tailors, bricklayers, native doctors, vendors of condiments, ordinary bazaar people and carpet makers. 'All these people profess the Wahabee religion; but your servant has named only a few of them.'[6] The Wahabi preaching meant the main strict reliance on manners faithful to the ways prescribed by the Almighty, and hence ethical virtues, reading and propagation of certain select texts; refusal to admit any intermediary in the relation between the God and the people; and hatred of wealth, easy manners, pomp and corruption. It also meant readiness to die at the service of the Almighty and take life, if duty called for that step, of the infidel, who could be a corrupt Muslim, an oppressive Sikh, a local tyrant in the service of the colonial administration, a British or a European. Thus it was a race war, the war between two races – the faithful and the sinners – in it were congealed all the attritions of

the time, namely colonial rule, subjection, racial differences, clash of moral virtues and contrasting organizational styles.

Wahabi preachers became the first clerics to preach *jihad* against the British. One of the few who escaped Delhi after its capture by the British in September 1857, Sarvar-ul-Mulk, in his memoirs, testified to the Wahabi influence over some of the major figures of revolt in Delhi.[7] Historians also tell us of the presence of a coalition of militant preachers such as the *Wahabi maulavis*, militant *Naqshbandi faqirs*, pious civilians, weavers, artisans, cart pullers and loaders, who remained a constant feature of the crowds and the *jehadis* in Delhi in those days.[8] Wahabi revolutionary pamphlets called for killing the infidels, yet talked of the need of unity between '*din* and *dharma*' and to stop all fights over 'cows and pigs'. Jihadis regularly poured into Delhi in those months, and Muslim clerics took particular pain to assure the Hindus with these magnificent words, whose import has still to be understood. Dalrymple quotes Maulavi Muhammad Baqar as appealing to the Hindus,

> If God brings all magnificent kingdoms to an end after a short period, why do you not comprehend that God has sent his hidden help (to defeat) this hundred year old kingdom (of the British), so that this community (of the Christians) who regarded the children of God with contempt, and addressed your brothers and sisters as 'black men', have now been insulted and humiliated? Realise this, and you will lose your fear and apprehension. To run away and turn your back now would be akin to denying divine help and favour.[9]

Not only that, the colonial army officials noted that the Wahabis fought more heroically than the ordinary company (mutineer) soldiers and that they fought 'without any apparently defined object'; they were '*gazis*'. Yet, when Delhi was finally falling to pounding cannons, rifles and bayonets of the British army, these *gazis* united with the soldiers and fell first in the battle or advanced recklessly out of the city on horseback with open swords to attack the enemy positions and die in numbers. It is said that Bakht Khan, after reaching Delhi commanding the rebels from Awadh, had walked straight into the emperor's private chamber with his shoes and said, 'Old Man, we have made you the king.'[10] Charles Ball, in the immediate aftermath of the mutiny writing of the events, tells us of the contempt with which the soldiers treated the bankers, moneylenders and the *bania* traders in Delhi.[11] Ball's account in fact vindicates what many Wahabis had thought, that the

colonial army had faced the mutiny as a religious war; the appellation 'Christian' abounds in this massive book (in God's name, Christian virtues, Christian courage, Christian inhabitants, etc.). The fact is, of course, that Wahabi influence did not end with the defeat of 1857. Exactly as was the case in the revolt of 1857, in its aftermath too the Wahabi remained a shadowy figure almost everywhere. In the Ambala Trial (1864), the government pressed charges against the accused of supplying 'men, money, arms' to the Northwest. Yahya Ali and Abdul Rahim of Sadiqpur, Patna; Abdul Gaffar, Rahim's servant; Muhammad Shafi, a meat contractor to military cantonments in North India; Muhammad Jafar of Thaneswar; Qazi Mia Jan of Comecolly, Patna; and five others (altogether eleven) were put on trial. The accused remained quiet, only one cross-examined the witnesses, Muhammad Shafi and Muhammad Jafar were sentenced to death and the rest were transported for life with all their properties confiscated. Yahya Ali muttered all through the proceedings that no one should care how one died, for one always returned to God. All of them said on hearing the verdict: Allah was merciful, and when God would decide to take one's life, nobody would be able to stop that, and, if Allah so decided, the life of Sir Herbert Edwardes, the British Judge, could also end, in fact earlier than the life of the faithful sentenced to death. It so happened that Sir Herbert died of pneumonia within months of return to London, immediately after the trial was over, and Muhammad Jafar saw it as God's punishment, while the administration decided in the fear of backlash that instead of executing the three, they be sent to the Andaman Islands across the sea. In the Patna Trial, the Sessions Court sentenced Ahmadullah to death, a verdict that the High Court changed into transportation for life and confiscation of all property. Qeyamuddin, based on the records left by the convicted after they were released from the Andaman Islands, details the extreme physical torture of them by colonial police and intelligence officials in the mainland and in the ships.[12] The chronicler Hunter appreciated the qualities of the conspirators, such as 'admirable sagacity . . . capacity for complicated operations . . . genuine and bonafide work . . . cunningly mixed with anti-government activity . . . fidelity of the great majority of the workers to the Movement'.[13]

Yet as the war of races was being fought, we must also note that the suspicion of the colonial power regarding the conduct of the insubordinate race was playing a critical role in making the Indian Muslims a minority. Wahabis not only claimed that they were never subjects of the Queen, as they maintained when they were brought to trial in the Sessions Court at Ambala in June 1864, and, therefore, the trial of the

Wahabis for waging war against the Queen and for sedition was based on a legal myth; they also maintained certain principles as the basis of their conduct that symbolized a challenge to sovereign power.

These principles briefly were (a) reliance on one Supreme Being, (b) repudiation of all forms and ceremonies and reliance instead on the scripture, (c) the duty of Jehad or holy war against the evils or infidels (d) and the expectation that some imam or spiritual leader (like Syed Ahmed or a Caliph) would lead the faithful in the war against alien rule. Pursuit of these principles, which should have looked innocent on paper, evoked enormous suspicion among colonial rulers, simply because they indicated a separate set of norms for living, a distinctly separate goal of life and a separate behavioural code than what the colonial rule understood or was ready to accept. All these principles indicated Wahabis' determination to mark themselves (i.e. the subjects) as a race apart from the rulers. It was the raw arrogance of counter-racism that angered Viceroy Lord Mayo who commissioned Hunter to write the report. He had expressed his determination to 'put down Wahabeeism in India as [he] had put down Fenianism in Ireland' and had engaged Hunter to conduct the inquiry into whether Muslims were bound by their religion to rebel against the Queen. Mayo's brief to Hunter was clearly around the 'vexed question of loyalty'[14] in those transitional times. We do not know if there was any immediate use of Hunter's report, though, as we shall see subsequently, Hunter's reasoning marked the beginning of the governmental logic of 'handling the minorities' and provided a lasting blueprint for colonial rule and even post-colonial politics to tackle the minority question through effecting a shift in politics from one of identity to that of development. It is interesting to see against this background what Hunter actually said and prescribed in order to bring the conduct of the insubordinates to compliance and submission.[15]

Colonial governmental wisdom

The first thing to note is Hunter's remark that the source of persistence of the rebellion and mass insubordination was a 'mystery'. This was a 'chronic conspiracy'.[16] He referred to the economic breakdown of areas in the frontier region and the travels of Syed Ahmed to Mecca and other places, but significantly repeatedly mentioned the mystery of faith to which Syed Ahmed, whom he mentioned as the 'Prophet', would successfully appeal, so much so that even if some recruits would die in the holy war, others would join or at least help with money and other resources. Therefore beneath the mystery of conduct remained the question of faith.

But Hunter did not stop there, and this is the second point. He thought that he had found a way to break that mystery of conduct. He proceeded to first show how the style of congregation, and here he was referring to the Patna centre of the Wahabis, prevented the officials and outsiders to enter and know what was happening inside the seminary. He spoke of the 'labyrinth of walls and outhouses . . . and side doors, and little secret courts in out-of-way-corners'.[17] Secrecy led to conspiracy, which would become 'chronic'. As we know the Patna centre was razed to ground by an order of the colonial administration after the Patna and Ambala trials.

Third, Hunter undertook to carefully analyse how clerics and Islamic jurists had interpreted the duty and the call to *jihad*, and he argued at length that in India there were both moderate, sane-minded clerics and 'fanatic' clerics interpreting the faith. Hunter noted the impact of the punitive policies of the administration on the clerics and pointed out the need to understand the significance of the division within the clerics. In anticipating a policy of division and playing on it to ensure the loyalty of the subjects, he, of course, had to answer, namely who were the 'fanatics'? Here he was not only indicating a governmental strategy; he was basing himself on a long tradition of Enlightenment in calling a line of thought as 'un-reason' or as 'fanaticism'. His entire prescription of what Her Majesty's government should do depended on this fundamental diagnosis; his analysis of the 'decisions of the Muhammadan Law Doctors'[18] fanaticism, Hunter found, was an emotion filled with excessive, uncritical zeal for one's faith; it emerged when, in mindless pursuit of aims, efforts were re-doubled and the follower refused to change mind and subject. Therefore, the fanatic displayed very strict standards and little tolerance for contrary ideas or opinions. Hunter noted the high levels of intensity, enthusiasm, commitment and zeal shown for particular activities. Like today's psychological experts in the business of counter-terrorism, Hunter too used terms indicating attitudes and behavioural proclivities, at times indicating a kind of cultural syndrome or deep psycho-pathology, only which could explain the resistance of the Wahabis, their 'Islamic' intolerance and, by inference, their 'illiberalism'. Wahabis, therefore, could not be subjects of 'rule of law'; their revolt had raised the spectacle of fanaticism. It was in the oriental mind and appeared as an invariable in the colonial context. In understanding why Hunter had to take this line of reasoning, we must recall how in modern European thought faith played a big role in defining racism.

In this context we have to remember the long tradition in modern European thought,[19] beginning with Martin Luther who called

the peasant rebel leader of his time Thomas Muntzer a fanatic and on whom Frederick Engels wrote the famous tract on *Peasant War in Germany* (1850). Fanatics practised iconoclasm. They formed a crowd – a mob, a mad group determined in their purpose of vandalism and destruction. Voltaire too had linked fanaticism with a particular faith and culture. However, it is in Immanuel Kant's work that we find the most sophisticated argument. Kant distanced himself from any culturalist argument and placed the question as a matter of subjectivity, and thus related to the relationship between knowledge and practice. In his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant distinguished between religious fanaticism, which related to the knowledge of God, and moral fanaticism, which confused morals with sentiments, beliefs and faith, and the moral fanatic became a moral extremist in this way. The moral fanatic was a subject who refused to agree to the universality of duty and, therefore, as Hunter argued in the case of India, could become killer and destroyer. Hunter did not, of course, make the fine distinction that Kant had made between religious and moral fanaticism. To him, the Patna *emirs* were symbols of both. But Hunter noted with satisfaction that not all Islamic jurists were fanatics, and therein lay the hope for British rule in India. Yet he gave caution with these words,

> It has always seemed to me that the best men are not on our side. Hitherto they have been steadily against us, and it is no small thing that this chronic hostility has lately been removed from the category of an imperative obligation. Even now the utmost we can expect of them is non-resistance. But an honest government may more safely trust to a cold acquiescence, firmly grounded upon a sense of religious duty, than to a louder-mouthed loyalty, springing only from the unstable promptings of self-interest.[20]

But Hunter did not end there. He opened the next chapter of his report by saying,

> The Indian Musalmans are therefore bound by their own law to live peaceably under our rule. But the obligation continues only so long as we perform our share of the contract and respect their rights and spiritual privileges. Once let us interfere with their civil and spiritual status so as to prevent the fulfilment of the ordinances of their Faith, and their duty to us ceases. We must enforce submission, but we can no longer claim obedience. It is the glory of the English in India, however, that they have substantiated for

> their military occupation of all former conquerors a Civil Government adapted to the wants and supported by the goodwill of the people.

Thus government would mean complementing military administration by civilian efforts at administration, moving away from the tactics of occupation and listening carefully to complaints and grievances, because persistence of even 'minor grievances' could attain the 'gravity of political blunders'. Hunter said that the colonial government must realize that it had already committed such blunders, in no small measure, while it was true that the full force of arms must be brought to bear upon the recalcitrant and the 'traitors' to British rule.[21]

In this way Hunter arrives at the developmental argument for governing the minorities – an argument with which we are familiar today in more than one form. He said that reforms such as the Permanent Settlement had done enormous harm to the Muslim men of substance. Muslim peasants – here he was specifically referring to the deltaic land of Bengal – had become dispossessed of land and wealth. British rule had damaged the Islamic system of education, thus ruining the leading stratum of Muslim society. The colonial system of administration had no scope for the educated men of Islamic society. Recruitments in the army for the Muslims were completely closed. Disaffection was thus bound to spread. He used interchangeably the two terms *Islamic* and *Muslim* in his analysis. Muslims as the ruling race had lost power with British conquest and could not compete with the Hindus in absorbing modern education and lagged far behind in competition to get into modern educational system, bureaucracy and other establishments. In the modern professional avenues also they lagged behind. Worst, the administration had taken away all the wealth of the various Muslim charity foundations and institutions meant for education, relief and redress of grievances. Hunter suggested that particularly in the field of education and professional training the government must pay special attention to the condition of Muslims. All these were tasks of a civilian government, and if the British were not to remain only an occupation regime, it must understand civil needs, the needs of the society. Else deaths – of the Muslim fanatics on the battlefield or through court orders, that is by hanging – would turn many more believers into followers of the radical clerics.[22]

Today these arguments seem banal, but through these 160 years the basic reasoning has remained the same.[23] Identity and development – these two – are the intersecting axes of the task of governing minorities. As we shall see in the following pages, this line of reasoning

would soon lead to a combined strategy for governing the disaffected groups – one, the strategy of representation (i.e. mechanisms of representation of a minority group to make the latter obedient subject) and, second, shaping the civilian way of doing things in the same orderly way in which military affairs are conducted. Indeed at every stage of governance the civilian will take off from the military roots, and if possible with the military model in mind. The nineteenth-century development of constitutional government in India (including the enactments such as the Evidence Act, Indian Penal Code, establishment Governor-General's Council, Indian Criminal Procedure Code and Indian Police Act) depended at every stage on a successful resolution of a conflict by armed means.[24] The Ambala and Patna trials to which Hunter made copious references in *The Indian Musalmans* were possible because of the recent developments of the instruments of 'rule of law', made possible in turn by the preceding law commissions set up in the wake of insurgencies and the mutinies between 1830 and 1860. In short, Hunter conveyed the lesson in his report that government must run strategically. On both these lines of thinking Hunter left enough hints in this classic tract.

Group recognition and the subsequent development of colonial wisdom

We shall pass the next phase very quickly. Within forty years of Hunter writing the *Indian Musalmans*, the administration made the first conscious move towards the direction indicated by Hunter, first in the form of the Partition of Bengal and then the Government of India Act 1909 or the Indian Councils Act of 1909, commonly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms. We need not re-travel the story of the first Partition of Bengal. We must recall only the rationale cited by the government for the order to Partition.

On 19 July 1905 a *Gazette Extraordinary* published the resolution of the government of India on the Partition of Bengal. By this resolution a new province was to be created

> with the status of Lieutenant-Governorship consisting of the Chittagong, Dacca, and Rajshahi Divisions of Bengal, the District of Malda, the state of Hill Tipperah, and the present Chief Commissionership of Assam. Darjeeling will remain with Bengal, in order to maintain associations and links, which are highly valued in both areas. (Entitled as Eastern Bengal and Assam) the capital of the new province will be Dacca with subsidiary headquarters at

> Chittagong. It will comprise an area of 106,540 square miles and a population of 31 million, of whom 18 millions are Muhamedans and 12 millions are Hindus. It will possess Legislative Council and a Board of Revenue of two members; and the jurisdiction of the High Court of Calcutta will be left undisturbed. The existing province of Bengal, diminished by the surrender of these large territories on the east and of the five of the Hindi states of Chota Nagpur, but increased by the acquisition of Sambalpur and five Uriya states, will consist of 140,580 square miles with a population of 51 million, of which 42 millions are Hindus and 6 millions are Muhamedans. In short, the territories, now composing Bengal and Assam, will be divided into two compact, self-contained provinces, by far the largest constituents of each of which will be homogenous in character, and which will possess clearly defined boundaries and be equipped with complete resources of an advanced Administration.[25]

On the basis of this resolution Bengal was partitioned on 1 September 1905. In 1903 H.H. Risley, secretary of the Government of India, in a long memo to the chief secretary of the Government of Bengal, articulated different possible positions in favour of and against Bengal Partition. In that memo, not only did he carefully consider the various situations if the reorganization of Bengal Presidency was undertaken, in terms of trying to achieve the right fit between size of the territory and population (number and mix), as constituent units of the Indian Empire, but he also conjectured on the resultant political picture.[26] In protest, one of the earliest modern nationalist public meetings was held in the Town Hall of Kolkata on 18 March 1904. The resolution of that protest meeting contested the proposal of Risley paragraph by paragraph and showed how, even by the yardstick of scientific and rational administration, Dhaka, Mymensingh, and 24 Paraganas are integral parts of Bengal, how the Assam administration can be made to pay on its own without the addition of territory to it and how the charge of under- or mal-administration of the eastern part of Bengal was untrue. The case against the break-up of Bengal was argued on all possible grounds, including the ground, namely that the caste marriages across the proposed Bengal divide would become difficult (Paragraph 44) if Bengal was divided. Hierarchy would return in intra-Bengal relations, language would suffer and only an alien administration would stand to gain.[27] As we know, undeterred, the colonial administration divided Bengal on 1 September 1905. The first large protest meeting was held on 7 August 1905 in the same

place of first protest – the Calcutta Town Hall. The meeting called for a dialogue and reconsideration of the government stand. The chief secretary of Bengal government R.W. Carlyle issued a circular to all subordinate officers on 10 October 1905 to ensure that educational institutions in the city and the districts would not be turned into protest venues. The Anti-Carlyle Circular Society was born on 4 November 1905. The All India Muslim League was born next year in Dhaka. Hindu nationalists and Muslims did not totally agree on the Partition issue, but not all Muslims supported Partition unconditionally. Tagore and many others protested against Partition, while they also saw the entangled nature of the issue, complicated by high landlordism (mostly Hindu landowners), religion, access to education and public employment and other such issues. Likewise, Muslim leaders like Akram Khan, Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Ismail Shiraji associated with nationalist endeavours while continuing dialogues with Congress, the predominant nationalist forum of the Hindus.[28] Similarly the militant nationalists, who were the early terrorists, also worked in the mainstream opposition to Partition. Finally, the Partition was annulled in 1911 in the face of continuing militant public protest, but Assam got separated from Bengal. The story of protests involved dimensions of organization, agitation, pamphleteering, petition, secret activity, fundraising, publicly arguing, mobilizing, boycott of foreign goods, bomb-throwing, assassinating, processions, night vigils and public fast, but this is a story we shall bypass here.

More important in the present context of our discussion is the strategy the colonial government followed of rightsizing the territory and rightshaping the population by creating a Hindu and a Muslim Bengal within the Bengal Presidency. This story by itself shows how far the colonial rule had advanced in terms of the techniques of government. Rightsizing and rightshaping were important policies towards securing consent of at least part of the population. Thus, the Government of India's Resolution of 19 July 1905 did not forget to mention,

> The Governor-General in Council is fully aware of the opposition, which these proposals (of territorial reorganisation) have encountered and has no desire to undervalue the sentiments upon which it has been based. Ties of mutual association grow up so quickly and become so closely interlaced, that territorial redistribution can rarely be accomplished except at the cost of a disruption, which is often painful and generally unpopular. On the other hand when old connections are severed, new ones almost immediately take their place growing with a rapidity that in a very short time is found to

invest them with sanctity scarcely inferior to that of the associations, which they have superseded. The Government of India are encouraged by previous experience to hope that such will be the case in the present instance. They will be greatly disappointed if there are not found in the new Province elements of cohesion, which will speedily endow it with a stability and individuality of its own. In any case the Government that is called upon to decide such cases must regard them from a wider standpoint than that of purely local, in all probability transient considerations. . . . All (proposals) have been duly considered and have not been rejected until they were found to contain flaws or drawbacks, which were inconsistent with essential aim. On the other hand the scheme, which was preferred to them, has received the practically unanimous approval of the leading officials of the three Administrations whom it directly affects as well as the final sanction of the Secretary of State.

The second condition above referred to, is that, as far as possible an attempt should be made to remove every well-grounded cause of complaint and to satisfy every reasonable demand on the part of those who will be personally affected by the new arrangement. . . .

The result is the creation of a new Province, founded upon that, which is the secret of all good administration, namely the close contact, in so far as this is possible in areas of great size, of the Governors, with the governed.[29]

The first Bengal Partition had to be annulled in 1911. But both John Morley, the Liberal secretary of state of India, and Earl of Minto, the hard right-wing governor-general of India believed that the suppression of terrorism in Bengal was necessary but not sufficient to establish the stability of rule. They believed that a noteworthy step was required to retain the loyalty of the subjects or at least the wealthy part of them and to retain the Muslim aristocracy on their side. They produced reforms known by the name of the Indian Councils Act of 1909, which did not cover any significant distance towards meeting nationalist demands for home rule but introduced elections of Indians to various legislative bodies for the first time. Limited electoral power also had separate provisions for the Muslims. The Act of 1909 was therefore important for the following reasons: first, it effectively allowed the election of Indians to the various legislative councils in India for the first time, though the majorities of the councils remained British-government appointments and the electorate was limited to specific classes of Indian nationals. Second, the introduction of the

electoral principle laid the groundwork for a parliamentary system with the acknowledgement of the existence of minor groups. Third, the Act of 1909 stipulated that Indian Muslims be allotted reserved seats in the Municipal and District Boards, in the Provincial Councils and in the Imperial Legislature, and that the number of reserved seats be in excess of their relative population (25 per cent of the Indian population). Finally, only Muslims were to vote for candidates for the Muslim seats, to be known later as the infamous separate electorate system. As we know, while majority-centric nationalist opinion all along thought that this was a divisive ploy, as further constitutional reforms were introduced, Muslims became ever more determined to hold on to, and if possible expand, reserved seats and their weight. This was the classic instance of an *aporia* – a situation of closure – where the solution of a problem was found wanting in terms of the structure of the problem. In this case the problem was that governmental reason (here, it was related to the logic of representation) wanted to find its own feet and a way to rationally administer the society including inter-group relations, while the solutions that the government found took it back in one way or another to the problematic of sovereignty.

Governmental reasoning, of course, did not stop there. In exactly ten years, another major attempt was initiated to strengthen civilian administration through another round of constitutional reforms, known as the Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms, once again to introduce gradually self-governing institutions. Edwin Samuel Montagu, the secretary of state of India, and Lord Chelmsford, then viceroy of India joined hands to author a report that became the basis of the Government of India Act, 1919. They met Indian leaders like Gandhi and Jinnah to discuss possibilities of introducing limited self-government and protecting the rights of minority communities. The changes introduced at the provincial level were significant, as the provincial legislative councils contained a considerable majority of elected members. In 1921 another change recommended by the report was carried out when elected local councils were set up in rural areas, and during the 1920s the electoral basis of the urban municipal corporations was widened to Indianize them, which meant that the divisions introduced a decade back would now become deeper. The report had stated that there should be a review after ten years. John Simon headed the review committee, popularly known as the Simon Commission. The commission recommended further constitutional change. Three roundtable conferences were held in London in 1930, 1931 and 1932, with the representation of the major interests. Gandhi attended the 1931 roundtable after negotiations with the British government. The major