

State and Society in Pre-modern South India

by R. Champakalakshmi, Kesavan Veluthat and
T.R. Venugopalan (eds.), 2002, Thrissur:
Cosmo Books, pp. 223, Price: Rs. 495.00.

State formation and social formation have been a subject of debate among prominent historians of India. This book exhibits the perspective of historians like Rajan Gurukkal, R. Champakalakshmi, Y. Subbarayalu, Kesavan Veluthat, M.G.S. Narayanan, M.R. Raghava Varier, Venkata Raghotam, K.N. Ganesh, B. Surendra Rao and Raju S. On the theme of state formation, Hermann Kulke edited the book *State in India*, where the dominant aspect of polemic was the deliberation concerning the feudalism in the state in India during the period 1000 to 1700. However, in the present work there is no premeditated bid made to contemplate the crystallization of the state or the nature of state per se. Yet there is specific absorbing enumeration regarding the association between state and different aspects of society.

Most of the authors are known for their erudite contribution in the history of South India. In the introduction the editors present the principal purpose of this book. To begin with there is a discussion of historiography of state in ancient India. The major predicament with the early historians of India, both Indian and western, was the acceptance of the notion of Oriental Despotism and Asiatic Mode of Production. Both these notions meant the state and society in ancient India was static, unchanging and ruled by use of force. Both colonial historians and nationalist historians to defend or attack the colonial structure conveniently used this theory. However after obtaining independence there lingered no colonial framework to attack or to defend. In the post colonial period scholars like D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and others have convincingly denounced the concept of Oriental Despotism and Asiatic Mode of Production. In the case of South India some scholars have tried to probe the process of evolution of state and shift in the nature of state. This has resulted in emphasis on theory of feudalism which lays accent on disruption of core state structure and advent of several peripheral states. However now an attempt has been made to modify this argument by suggesting that there was integration and not breakdown of state structure. The present volume is the proceedings of a seminar.

The participants in this seminar have discussed about the aspects such as processes of state formation, the structure of state in different regions and periods, its linkages with institutions, its base in economic and social structures and the ideological and institutional supports it sought. The editors do not claim any exhaustive survey of state and society in South India in pre-modern period. This work does not consider the theory of segmentary state presented by Burton Stein.

Rajan Gurukkal in his article, 'Antecedents of the State Formation in South India' negates the position of kingdom to early ruling clans like Ceras, Colas and Pandyas. At best they can be considered as chiefdoms. Accumulation of taxation was not the basic source of revenue in the case of these pre state political units. The transition to formation of state can be seen during sixth and seventh centuries. During this period there was establishment of brahman settlements. Brahmanas propagated hierarchical relation in the society. The process of state formation involved "the transition from kin-labour to non-kin labour, multiple functionaries to hereditary occupation groups, clans to castes, simple clannish settlements to structured agrarian villages, and chiefdom to monarchy". (P. 58) R. Champakalakshmi in her essay, 'The City, The Hinterland and the State: South India Under The Colas' gives importance to study of urban sphere of influence. She asserts that Kutamukku-Palairai retained its importance throughout Cola despite the selection of Tanjavur as main royal centre. Y. Subbarayalu writes about the relation between state and society during Cola period. He says that, "The Tamil society during the time of the Colas was definitely a stratified society. But the stratification was a gradual process starting from a simple and undifferentiated society and ending up with a mature caste society in the course of the four hundred years, from the 9th to the 13th century." (P. 84) Kesavan Veluthat in his article, 'The Temple and the State: Religion and Politics in Early Medieval South India' has analysed the political role of the temple. Temple was an organiser of production and distribution and it was an agency of social interaction. The royal temples exemplified the hegemony of the state through royal inscriptions. The brahmanical temples on the other hand stood as a synonym for the state. M.G.S. Narayanan attempts to present a new interpretation of nature of state under Ceraman Perumals of Kerala. He says that the royal family was compelled to obey the instructions of the brahman oligarchy.

Raghava Varier tries to elucidate the later stages of state formation in Kerala. Venkat Raghotham in his essay, 'Empire and Historiography in Late Medieval South India: A Study of Early Vijayanagara State' demonstrates how the past is used as legitimising paradigm. Vijayanagara tried to justify its imperium by appropriating the histories of the dynasties of the regions and projecting itself as the legitimate successor state of the pre-Vijayanagara kingdoms. K.N. Ganesh discussed the relation between land relation and state formation. There was expansion of agriculture under the

royal patronage, private magnates and brahmanas. B. Surendra Rao studies the political order in Karnataka under Wodeyars of Mysore between 1578 and 1704. Mysore emulated its predecessor state Vijayanagara for the purpose of legitimation. S. Raju demonstrates how some regions are partially recognized, sidelined and omitted when history is conceptualised within the framework of homogenous units like South India.

The essays in this volume endeavored to present the divergent views regarding state and society in pre modern South India. The theorisation and methodology adopted by the scholars may guide other historians who study the problem of state formation in South India. There is a need to study nature of state of early Karnataka dynasties like Kadambas, Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas. For such a study the theories and evidence culled from other regions of South India would prove useful.

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An Earth to Inherit

by Anita Cheria and Edwin [eds.], 1999, Bangalore:
Association For Rural Poor, Chennai and
Development Support Initiative.

This book is a serious attempt to reflect the processes involved in building up a prosperous society where the basic needs of every individual will be taken care. The processes are replicable to diverse geographical, socioeconomic and political conditions and hence are powerful tools to realize this prosperity. For any one serious with continuous and permanent developmental growth of humanity, this book would be a practical and useful guide.

For laymen it would be an enlightenment to know that even to acquire basic needs on a continuous basis for a majority of the third world people is a struggle. It is a struggle with people all around them. A struggle to get employment, proper wages, social security, help in times of crisis etc. It is a war against employers, the State, the rich, the politically powerful, bureaucrats etc. These are given to them as charity and not as a matter of right. The general public endorses such an attitude and

keeps quite without taking any action. Even when there are able-bodied enterprising individuals in every urban city, rural areas, tribal areas, forest areas and in every nook and corner of the country, there are no opportunities. There are no opportunities, to learn skills for a living, jobs, career planning and growth, personal and family development.

For policy makers, bureaucrats, development organizations and activists the book is an enabler to think seriously about the progressive steps undertaken so far by them, the serious lacunae in their strategy formulation and implementation especially in the areas of operationalizing sustainable development practices.

It gives a strong lesson that to sustain the movements of the masses and replicate the same all over the country the organization implementing that must be first sustainable and to achieve this it suggests practical strategies, nature of such sustainability, resources, socioeconomic and political supportive environment that it needs to create for itself.

It also gives strong lessons of conserving our natural resources without overexploiting them. The serious threat of commoditization of natural resources where every unit of physical resources is seen in terms of money and is pushed into to the vicious business cycle is stressed. It warns the readers that after all these wealth accumulation at the cost of environment there will be only money and gold left on earth and no humans. So the message it conveys is "Use it sparingly promoting sustainable development".

The need to hand over the natural resources to the original owners that is the indigenous people of the land who know to manage them well is stressed rather than hand over it to capitalists who not only commodify and overexploit the resources but also alienate the original owners. These owners are pushed to the periphery of the society turning them into landless laborers in rural areas and wage laborers doing odd and menial jobs in urban areas.

For the exploited who are fighting for their rightful existence, it is a tremendous inspiration that people elsewhere have achieved developmental success. It is same developmental success these movements are striving to achieve. The book drives home these points straight. Get organized; Organize in Large Numbers; Start from self-help; Start with economic development programmes first; Become viable enterprises for banking with regular nationalized banks borrowing, able to generate profits out of the money borrowed and returning the Banks Principle with interest on time; Do linkages with other donor agencies, financial institutions and NGO's to do the same as above; Develop capacity building systems and through that manage

the development processes like skill building, income generation and employment generation; Develop systems of equitable distribution of wealth. The wealth must be distributed to the weaker sections like women, children, Dalits, tribals, the urban poor and the poor. Involving these sections in planning their destiny is important; With the large numbers of the exploited masses develop critical mass for Apex Bodies and Development Committees, which will have representatives from the entire area of developmental interventions. These bodies will be a link between the people and the development players; finally the critical mass should hold enough political clout in the intervention area because the state is the biggest player in Development. NGO's cannot and should not make parallel Governments. They should enable the exploited masses to make the Government and as much as possible rule it being in political power. Another strategy is to enable them to take administration into their hands by joining the civil services.

To all, the book urges to leave this earth as a place which is worth inheriting and without inequality, injustice and environmental degradation. It is the best gift we can give our future generation.

The book goes in a step-by-step process explaining all the principles and practices with case studies so as to enable the development players to bring about sustainable development and hence enable communities to become sustainable in nature. The book needs to reflect the difficulties and challenges faced during the implementation process so that this can enhance learning. Also other development players need not commit the same mistake again.

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