The State and civil society in India are often characterised as complex realms of socio-political engagement given the very nature of their origin and development under colonial and postcolonial conditions. While the State in India had been undergoing changes during the colonial days, the civil society had become vibrant in the context of the challenges of modernity and the rising tempo of nationalism. The State had the pressure of colonial administration and all its requirements, but the civil society in its multitudes developed its own concerns and responses from different vantage points. These concerns and responses were manifested in the anti-colonial struggle, nationalist aspirations, anti-caste/socio-religious reform movements, civil liberty activities etc. In the postcolonial conditions, the State and civil society further went through a variety of experiences largely because of the new challenges of state-building and nation-building. It is within this complex setting of State-civil society engagements that the study of the Hindu Right becomes relevant. This chapter, therefore, aims to analyse the trajectories of engagements of the State and civil society under the structural compulsions of colonial and postcolonial India.

Colonial Experience

The value of the concepts of State and civil society in a Third World context has been heavily criticised, as arguments against the universal applicability of the concepts developed within western political philosophy have been raised (Blaney and Pasha 1993; Rudolph 2000; Wickramasinghe 2005). It is said that the very idea of a civil society, and also its proposed role in the development and consolidation of democracy is confined to a unique West European (and possibly North American) experience (Berglund 2009). In order to validate this, it is necessary to understand the respective developments of the State in both the West and in the Third World. The modern State was in the West paradoxically developed simultaneous with a civil society, a process covering centuries, which included a gradual shift towards a more powerful and efficient State, but also towards a stronger and more independent civil society. In the Third World the power of the pre-colonial State was, in most cases, not absolute in the same sense as in
the West, with influential religious and traditional power structures often outside the immediate reach of State power. Every Third World society and every democracy has its own special construction of State–civil society relations, and almost all States have had a colonial history that influenced these relations. While differing from country to country the colonial period meant a serious break with traditional political organisation, and although such breaks are not necessarily negative for the development of democracy the close relation between the economic sphere and the state proved fatal for the development of both political democracy and civil society.

Olle Törnquist outlines how a symbiotic relation between politics and economy developed, where the State dominated the economic sphere and where economic success came through political power rather than skilful use of labour and capital. The domination of the colonial powers stopped the growth of a domestic capital owning middle class necessary to challenge both the State and the feudal order, and capitalism was, instead, introduced by external forces and controlled by an alliance between the colonial State and the ruling feudal classes. The middle classes outside the domination of the feudal system were very weak, as was the basis for a strong civil society. Although capitalism expanded in some areas, the expected process of social and political modernisation failed to show, largely because of the strong connection between the political and the economic sphere, and the feudal system was instead of being replaced, incorporated in the colonial capitalism. The symbiotic relation between politics and economy continued in the postcolonial period also. State-led modernisation plans became the order of the day, with a major role for the State within the economy and with continuously weak domestic capitalists. Also in this new setting the road to economic power ran through the political elite and through the state. The symbiosis of the political and economic spheres is one example of how State-civil society relations developed differently in the Third World, which has consequences on how the civil society theory can be applied (Törnquist 1999: 9-14). The relatively slow and—at least partly—peaceful growth of civil society and the development of civil and political rights in Western Europe have little or no correspondence in postcolonial States (Berglund 2009).
Mobilisation within the civil society in India was evident already in the colonial period but the formation of both State and civil society in India was different from that of Western Europe (Kaviraj and Khilnani 2003). While the modern State in the West developed simultaneous with civil society, a process covering centuries and included a gradual shift towards a more powerful and efficient State, but also towards a stronger and more independent civil society, the development of civil society in the rest of the world has not followed the same pattern. The powers of both the pre-colonial and the colonial State were not absolute: the State coexisted with influential religious and traditional power structures outside its immediate reach and the effects of these alternative power structures were evident also in the formation of the civil society. One example is the tendency of the British colonial State to respect religious differences and to divide the population according to faith. In the Indian case, this practice led to a strong position of the native religious elites, and the strengthening of religious identity in both the private sphere and in civil society (Ali 2001).

It seems to be relevant here to explain some aspects of the nature of Indian State in the pre-colonial era and also its mode of governance in the society. The political arrangements in the traditional India appear to have been stretched over three distinct levels. The micro foundations of power lay in the structure of village communities over which regional kingdoms exercised a real and proximate political authority. Power at the level of the village community exercised through the logic of the caste system (Louis Dumont 1970). Historically, the Aryans had compartmentalised the Indian social system into four ‘Varnas’: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra in accordance with the four functions that allotted to them respectively, knowledge: production and interpretation of the existing knowledge system, defence: the psychical protection of the people belonging to the other three varnas, wealth: trade and commerce, labour: the physical labour to the above three varnas of the social hierarchy (Kothari 2006:21-31). This division was based on the principle of purity/pollution.

According to Manu’s code of law (Olivelle 2005:91), the duties/functions broadly called ‘dharma’ is societally assigned to the individual and s/he has no choice at all to take decision on his own matters as concerned with the
work or has no right to cross-cut this pre-fixed Social boundary. The individual freedom, mobility in its modern sense was unknown and this system had continued to be the core of the Hindu social order. The *Varna* classification is a generalised one within which there existed umpteen numbers of castes (*Jatis*) and sub castes. This made the Indian social system more complex which resisted any generalisation. Indeed, to a greater extent this system of stratification made the Indian society static for a long period of time. This had been the prime instrument of exclusion which had frozen the intellectual and social development of the communities which were historically marginalised from the mainstream path.

Given the nature of this system, the State could not act as the symbol of society as a whole. The State itself was subject to the systemic control (Kaviraj 2000: 39-40). Unlike the territorial division of the modern nation-state, in the traditional Indian State, each significant practice would have a territorial structure specific to itself. Religious and economic domains demonstrated greater stability in comparison with the ‘high mortality’ of ruling dynasties and their general fragile States. The pre-colonial type of authority was not an authority for appeal against widespread structural injustice, oppressions of social process. The State had neither the great advantages nor the great responsibilities of being the universal institution, which assumed at least symbolic responsibility for society’s general good or evil (Ibid.: 41-42). Both the Mugals and the Britishers had not altered the system much. The society was under various conflicting power centres and was hierarchically ordered. The Britishers pursued a policy in which the colonial administration had linked the governmental authority with those power centres and avoided a direct link between the colonialists and the people in general. The colonial reluctance to intervene in the ‘private’ slowed down the possibility of social transformation.

The British colonialism introduced a new type of regime which favoured wealth compared to the previous one (Dumont 1997: 54). The contact of the Indian society with the colonial power was a contact of two very different principles of construction of society and state. The colonialists dealt with the system with the support of their rationalist discourses and gave primacy to commerce and economic control. In the traditional Indian
social thinking, commerce and economic activities were politically insignificant. The State only ‘squeezed’ the economy rather than restructuring it. The State and society were in a harmonious relation and the State never altered the Hindu social order. The Mughals also did not disturb this social system. They had established a ‘subordinate empire’ on the top without altering the caste-based village structure on the ground. But the British colonialism destabilised this dualism (Kaviraj 1997:143-152). Nicholas Dirks notes: “Colonialism changed things both more and less than has commonly been thought. While introducing new forms of civil society and separating these forms off from the colonial state, colonialism also arrested some of the immediate disruptions of change by preserving many elements of the old regime” (Dirks 1997: 164). The power under colonialism was public. The Britishers had created a public sphere which they filled with the European model of institutions and laws (Kaviraj 1997: 143). This rule of colonial difference was challenged by the nationalists (Chatterjee 1994:10). However, the colonial State was marginal and remained as a thin stratum of institutions, which focused on the maintenance of colonial order and the extraction of the public revenue (Kaviraj 1997:44). The overall practices of the British colonialism in India reveal some kind of an externality in their dealings with the natives which was quite contrary to the rationalist/humanist discourse that they used for legitimating their authority in the colony. The colonialists did not make any attempt to radically change the society, but followed a tricky business of extraction and accumulation.

However, the impact of colonialism was multifaceted. Most importantly, it altered the peaceful coexistence of different communities. Historically, Indian society was complex and in their day today experiences in the pre-colonial India, people had developed a composite culture. It had gone beyond the Bhakti-Sufi tradition. Neera Chnhokhe notes: “the inhabitants of Indian society during the course of working and living together or through the practice of everyday life had developed a common transcendent culture that both merged as well as surpassed the best of component cultures” (Chandhoke 2003: 199). The political practices under the colonial rule fragmented the society along the line of caste and religious differences. There were no communal conflicts reported before the nineteenth century except two incidents in 1710 and 1740. From the
nineteenth century onwards, we can see a chain of communal riots and caste wars. In a multi-religious society like India where the relation between religion politics being a complex one and the internal compositions of religion and modern politics were contradictory, this is not surprising.

A synthetic culture existed in the pre-colonial era. However, this did not mean that there had existed an egalitarian society in India. Compared to the ‘modern’ Indian society, it was relatively peaceful. Andre Beteille notes: “The organizing principles of Indian social life mainly came from Hinduism. The tolerance of diversity is an ethical basis of Hinduism. But this tolerance of diversity cannot be equated with the individual freedom and equality (Beteille 2005:367-68). The individual was chained with the prescribed duties and obligations and the ‘rights’ were unknown to them. The State had not much role in the society except the police function. The self-maintaining moral order of the caste system had subordinated the status of the State in the pre-modern India (Kaviraj 2000:40). The notable feature of the pre-colonial State-society relation was the “interweaving of change and changelessness.” The political boundaries may change but the basic structure of the society remained static (Ibid.: 42). Jayaprakash Narayan notes: the insularity of society from the state” ensured that the “vertical fragmentation of society continued and institutions remained static and frozen” (Narayan 2003: 78-79). This social system had been persisting without much alteration.

The Britishers ruled India not only by coercion alone but also by the power of their rational discourses which enabled them to sustain psychological domination among the natives. It should be noted that in the post-Mughal period the Indian society was so obsessed with certain practices of the religious belief system; specifically, Hinduism was beset with idolatry, polytheism and superstition. These practices were being challenged by various unorthodox sects which emerged in almost all parts of India. The Satnami, Appapanthi and Shivanarayan sects in Uttar Pradesh, the Karthabajas and Balamis in Bengal, the Charanadis in Rajasthan etc. denounced the degenerated practices of the Hindu religion, especially its caste distinctions. The nineteenth century intellectuals generally believed that the superstitious belief systems and social practices of the Indian
society were a stumbling block on the path of progress. While opposing the hegemonic values of the Indian feudal society, the intellectuals accepted the inevitability of the Western bourgeois order for the development of the Indian society (Panikkar 1995: 3-8). The Hindu religious reformers strongly opposed the superstitious belief system of their religion. This response emerged from the Western critique of the ‘Orient’ that it was a superstitious social formation. Indeed, the intellectuals were fascinated by the Western ‘security community.’ The newly emerged intelligentsia generally believed that the acceptance of Western Enlightenment values was the only panacea to shift the ‘insecure’ Indian social system into a ‘secure community.’

The Western Enlightenment project was a ‘security project.’ The gaze of Enlightenment viewed the rest as ‘inferior’ and they had to follow the West for developing a ‘rational’ socio-political order. The emerging modern nation-state in the West was viewed as symbol of security and development. The modern nation-state was a product of Western modernity, accompanied by the emergence of capitalist system, the advanced form of social and sexual division of labour and the transition from a theocentric world order towards a humanocentric order. Modernity is thus inextricably interlinked with reason, rational behaviour of the individual and primacy of ‘science’ over all other ‘traditional experiences.’ All this was to liberate man from superstitions. The discourses of modernity were the legitimising factor behind the colonisation of the eastern societies by the West. The Western Enlightenment project divided the world into two—the ‘civilised’ West and the ‘uncivilised’ East. The discourses were based upon the assumption that the West was a rational socio-political order and the rest were guided by unreason and superstitions. So the West believed that it had a legitimate role to ‘civilise’ the rest, the so called ‘White Man’s burden.’

In India, the British colonial authorities had maintained their hegemony over the inhabitants through various ways. Besides the civilian and military superiority, the colonialists also employed the power of rational discourses. They introduced railways, scholastic institutions, judicial system, defence infrastructure etc to facilitate the better extraction from the colony (Nehru 1993: 291-92). However, all these developments had
created a feeling of urgency to transform the Indian society from its age-old traditions into modern. Most importantly, the influences of Western education in the colonies had produced a new set of intelligentsia who strongly supported the inevitability of the Western Enlightenment values. Indeed, to the British, the assertion of the native intellectuals was an essential prerequisite for legitimising their regime in the colony. The educational policy of the British was to fulfil the administrative needs of the empire in India and also to sustain an ideological hegemony over the natives. While the educational programmes were oriented to the regeneration of the country, the Indian intellectuals pursued an educational strategy which promoted education through the medium of the vernacular languages. This new educational system gave primacy to science education, and it was the result of the growing awareness among the intelligentsia about the need of science for the progress of the country (Panikkar 1995: 7-12).

However, while supporting the Western rationality and its emancipatory role in the Indian society, the English educated intelligentsia never switched off their tradition. They were highly influenced by the spirituality of their saint tradition and its humanism. Partha Chatterjee viewed that by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into the spiritual and material, the anti-colonial nationalism created its own domain of sovereignty within the colonial society, well before it began its political battle with the imperial power. The ‘outside’ was the realm of ‘material,’ in which the West proved its superiority and the ‘inner’ was the sphere where the Indians preserved the distinctness of their ‘spiritual’ culture (Chatterjee 1994: 6). Thinkers like Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati and many others strongly supported the inevitability of the Western technology for the progress of India and, at the same time, they emphasised the importance of re-invoking the old rational tradition of Hindu religion. The reformist movements were aimed to regenerate the Indian society to the ages of an imagined past. They condemned the religious practices of their time because of their superstitious bias, and celebrated a rationalist tradition which was competent with the present variety of Western rationalist order (Nehru 1993: 335-39).
Bengali literary figure Bankim Chandra Chatterjee viewed that the British domination in India was the net result of its ‘cultural failure’ and he identified two reasons: Indians were lacking a natural desire for liberty; and the lack of solidarity among the Hindu folk (Chatterjee 1986: 54-56). Mahatma Gandhi offered a different reason that it was not because of the cultural weakness of India that India was under colonialism but the Indians were so fascinated by the glittering of the Western civilisation and they had become a subject people (Ibid.: 85-86). In his *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi severely criticised the modernist version of civil society in India, which brought forth total subjugation of the Indians to the West. He made a civilisational critique of the modern Western civilisation and emphasised the importance of re-invoking the Indian way of life and society (Gandhi 1938; Chatterjee 1986: 85-86).

The civil society in India evolved during the colonial period. It was embedded in the idea of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism.’ There are three ‘master narratives’ in Indian nationalism. One is secular nationalism propagated by the Indian National Congress; the other is religious nationalism which consisted of mainly two streams: the Hindu nationalism and the Muslim nationalism. There is another version, the caste-based assertions of the deprived sections. The first stream was more coalitional across caste and religious divisions. The second stream was radical, and it used the religious identity as the source for mobilisation. The caste-based identity assertions were basically against the existing exploitative Hindu social system; so naturally against the second stream and also it was a search for an alternative social order based on the principle of equality and social justice (Varshney 2002: 55-59). These movements were both a response to the colonial gaze and a product of colonial influences. The caste-based assertions challenged the Hindu social system and its discourses on the relationship between man and man. The Congress’s position was a Western secularist version of social mobility and national construction which was not at all anti-religious, but stressed the importance of detaching the State from religion. The secular nationalism became the dominant ideology of nation-building in India. The national resistance movement, spearheaded by the Congress was the main source of civil society activity in early twentieth century British India. When the Congress developed into a mass movement large segments of the
population were for the first time drawn into political and social activism, and while the struggle was basically anti-colonial, the movement held within itself many forms of activities which would continue as independent sections of civil society, one case in point being the women’s movement. Partly outside of the Congress also other forms of social movements gained in strength during the first half of the twentieth century.

The introduction of Western education in India had generated a modernist version of associational life and civic engagement. On the one hand, it reproduced the regime legitimacy and, on the other hand, the very structure had generated a number of critical discourses within and outside the realm of dominant civic engagement. The nationalist movement in India emerged as a response to the contradictory economic/political stand of the colonialists. The colonial policies had generated greater frustration among the newly emerged middle class, who were so fascinated by the emancipatory potential of the Western modernity which was so obsessed with the rational equality of all human beings. But under colonial rule the Indian middle class experienced a subordinate status in comparison with the colonial elites. They had questioned this self-contradictory stand of British colonialism.

The British colonial authorities followed a representational mode of governance and ruled out the possibility of a direct relationship between the individual and the State. Amir Ali notes: “National rituals in Europe emphasized common values and ‘traditions.’ They stressed a history that defined participants as like in their relationship to the state. On the contrary, imperial rituals in British India stressed the diversity of imperial rule” (Amir Ali 2001: 2420). The colonialists pursued a policy which linked the centres of power in the society with the colonial administration, consequently the feudal elements in the society got prominence under the colonial rule.

During the anti-colonial struggle, the nationalist elite established a modern associational life in India. Partha Chatterjee noted that it “emerged in accordance with the wishes of the nationalist elites during the anti-colonial struggle. They sought new ethical life in congruence with the Western society” (Chatterjee 2002: 176). The national civil society was established
well before the rise of mass nationalist movement in the early twentieth century. The elites were highly critical of the inconsistencies of the colonial State to cope with the modern standards of a liberal constitutional State (Ibid.: 75). The self-contradictory stand of the colonialism had generated greater frustration among the newly emerged ‘middle class’ (Chatterjee 1994). They turned against the colonial rule. But the role of the masses seemed out of question, because the anti-colonial movement turned to be a massive struggle only in the early part of the twentieth century, especially under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Chatterjee notes: “even as the associational principles of secular bourgeois civil institutions were adopted in the new civil society of the nationalist elite, the possibility of a different mediation between the population and the state was already being imagined, one that would not ground itself on a modernized civil society” (Chatterjee 2002: 175). This eventually led to the establishment of a superficial democracy.

From the nineteenth century onwards, struggles by untouchables and other deprived sections were underway against the existing exploitative system. This included the Mahar and non-Brahman movement of Maharashtra, the non-Brahman movement of Madras, Ezhavas of Kerala, the Chamars of Chhattisgarh area, the Namashudras of Bengal etc. These movements had recognised the modern Western view of democracy and the equality of man (Zelliot 2001:33-47). Though they were basically against the existing social evils of the Hindu belief system, they were also challenging the hegemonic nature of the religious reformist movements in British India. The religious movements like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, and the Theosophical Society had promulgated a version of Hinduism which was based upon the principle of harmoniously integrated Varnas. It was reformatory but not for any radical changes in the society (Nehru 1993: 335-39). The reformers were, however, legitimising the emancipatory potential of the ‘true’ Hinduism and argued that untouchability was the product of the ‘perverted’ Hinduism. This was challenged from different quarters especially the movements by the untouchables and other deprived sections. A large number of people who were under the lowest grade of the caste hierarchy in the Hindu social order had converted to Buddhism. There were such movements in many parts of India. Pandit C. Ayodhya Dasa (1845-1914), known as Iyothee
Thass, the forerunner of B.R. Ambedkar, had started neo-Buddhist movement in Tamil Nadu. He was in search of a new religion, based on liberty, equality and fraternity. He viewed that social emancipation was only possible through the Buddhist religion. He had started the South Indian Sakya Buddhist Association and converted many Dalits to Buddhism (Samel 2004: 182-83). The ‘Self Respect’ movement by E. V. Ramasamy Periyar was another example. The reformist movements under the guidance of Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and Sahodaran Ayyappan in Kerala were other instances noted in the history of modern India. The reform movements, on the whole, sought to ensure the vertical social mobility in India.

The Western educated Hindu middle class in the urban areas revolted individually or formed associations in their protest against the existing unjust social order. C. H. Heimsath classified these associations into three types: general (voluntary) associations; caste reform associations and religious reform bodies (Heimsath 1964). Social reform associations came into existence at the provincial and local levels. Some of these associations focused on the social issues like widow remarriage, child marriage and others protested against the religious authorities, superstitions, caste restrictions for crossing the sea etc. Most of them were loose organisations whose activities were largely restricted to arranging programmes, conferences, passing resolutions etc. Some reformers acted within their caste and formed caste associations. This was aimed to fight against the unacceptable practice of the caste system. The reformists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy formed the Brahma Samaj and protested against the practice of ‘Sati’ in the Hindu society. The Prarthana Samaj by M. G. Ranade in Bombay and the Arya Samaj by Dayananda Saraswati had played a decisive role in the nineteenth century reform efforts. Social reform movement among the Muslims began with the Aligarh Movement led by Syed Ahmad Khan (Jain 1965). In south India (Kerala), it was initiated by Vakkom Moulavi (Miller 1976). The movements within the Muslim community were the result of the growing realisation that called for use of the modern education and technology in a competitive socio-economic order.
In 1927 the All India women’s Conference (AIWC) was formed, influenced by the nineteenth century reform movements. It was associated with the nationalist movement and, later on, it became a part of the Congress party. During the colonial period, the organisations that addressed social issues and sought change in the status of women were closely associated with the nationalist movement. After independence, the AIWC was incorporated into the Women’s Indian Association and was succeeded by the National Federation of Indian Women. The Indian women's movement became particularly visible after the 1970s (Subramanian 2004: 635). However, AIWC was preceded by the birth of several women’s associations. In Bengal the Brahma Samaj had organised the Brahmika Samaj in 1856. The Arya Nari Samaj and the Bengla Mahila Samaj represented different fractions in the Brahmo Samaj. These were followed by a variety of local associations influenced by the revivalist ideas in the early twentieth century and many magazines for women (Dalits Intellectual Collectives 2009: 32-33). After 1910 a number of national and provincial women’s associations came into existence. It should be noted that these associations were initiated more by women without much influence from male social reform organisations. The first was Sarla Devi’s Bharath Stri Mahamandal, founded in 1910, followed by the Women’s Indian Association (WIA) in 1917 by Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret Cousins. Then came the National Council of Women in India (NCWI), a pro-British, social service-oriented elite organisation founded in 1925 by Lady Aberdeen, Lady Tata and others and linked provincial welfare charity organisations. The All India women’s Conference represented the association for Indian women in the colonial period. They organised campaigns on various issues in support of the Sarda Act against Child marriage, for women’s suffrage, against purdah etc

It may be noted that a number of women’s organisations and associations emerged in the post-independence period and some of them were associated with various political parties (Katzenstein 1989: 55). The Communist Party of India (CPI)-led the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA), Naxalite-inspired Progressive Organisation of Women (POW), Naxalite students group in Hyderabad, Stri Shakti Sanghtana(SSS), Janata Party-led Mahila Dakshata Samiti were some
of the prominent women’s organisations associated with the political parties (Ibid.: 55-56).

In the following decades, a lot of autonomous women’s organisations and associations mushroomed in different parts of the country. Those organisations were formally not having any party affiliation though there were no restrictions to the individual members to have party affiliation. In Delhi in 1979 a small group of women started the publication of Manushi (both Hindi and English). In 1982 ‘Saheli’ an organisation for women was formed which was concerned with the issues like dowry death and domestic violence. ‘Ankoor’ (with adult education), Jagari (with the collection of feminist documentation, film and literature), Kali for Women (devoted to the publication of original feminist literature and analysis), ‘Stree sangharsh’ (street plays about dowry murders etc), Bombay Forum against oppression of women, ‘Vimochana’ and ‘Street Jagrata Samiti’ in Bangalore, ‘Pennorima Iyakkam’ in Tamil Nadu, ‘Chingari Nari Sangathan’ in Ahmadabad, ‘Anweshi’ in Kerala were some of the women’s organisations that emerged in different parts of India.

The peasant movements were also so decisive in the political history of India. During the colonial period as well as in the postcolonial period the peasants revolted against the existing exploitative system. The so called Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the Moplah rebellion of 1836 and 1896, the Santhal and Munda revolts of the 1890s were the major peasant movements in the colonial era. At the end of the colonial rule, two major peasant movements had emerged—Tebhaga movement in Bengal in 1946-7 and the Telengana uprising in Andhra in 1946-48. There were also a large number of minor peasant revolts reported during the colonial period (Viswanath 1990: 118). Kathleen Gough discovered 77 major and minor peasant revolts during the colonial rule (Gough 1974).

The Congress linked some localised peasant movements like the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928, the non-rent campaign with the broad national movement for independence etc (Low 1977). However, the Congress never encouraged any movement which sharpened the conflict between the landlords and tenants (Pandey 1977). The role of the Kisan Sabha was noticeable in organising various agrarian movements, especially in UP,
Bengal, Bihar, Punjab during the 1920s (Rasul 1974). The role of the leftist parties in organising various movements in the society was also so decisive. The movements like the Telengana uprising (Ram 1973), the Tebhaga Movement (Bandyopadhyaya 2001), the Naxalite movement (Mukherji 1987), the land grab movements in the 1960s, and the agricultural labours movements in Kerala since 1940s were remarkable.

The movements by the Tribals added new dimensions to the existing struggles. K. S. Singh viewed that while the peasant movements remained purely agrarian as peasants lived off land, the tribal movements were both agrarian and forest based. There was also the ethnic factor; the tribal revolts were directed against zemindars, moneylenders and petty government officials not because they exploited them but also because they were aliens (Singh 1986: 166). During the nineteenth century the British had come into conflict with various tribes in different parts of the country when they annexed tribal kingdoms and imposed British administrative system in those areas (Mathur 1988). The identity crisis led to revolts against the existing colonial domination, and in the post colonial period the statist interferences in the name of development and nation-building brought about the same situation and their struggles got intensified.

Like the tribal movements, the Dalit movements in India also emerged as responses to the socio-economic-cultural differences existing within the system. The leaders like Jyotiara Phule represented a very different outlook on India—different from all the upper caste elite thinkers of the so-called Indian renaissance. The elite expressed an ideology of `national revolution.` It was the nationalism of a class combining bourgeois and high caste traditions. Phule represented the ideology of the social revolution with a peasant and anti-caste outlook (Omvedt 1971). In states like Kerala, there were many movements against social discrimination and exploitation. The organisations like Sree Narayana Darma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (KPMS), and the upper class organisations like Nair Service Society (NSS), Namboodiri Kshema Sabha, and various Christian and Muslim organisations were instrumental in the emergence of modern Kerala.
Most of the reform movements in the nineteenth century were basically socio-religious. B.R. Ambedkar’s perceptions were a turning point in the history of assertion of the deprived sections. A leader of the Mahar community and the inspiring source of Dalit assertion in India had pointed out that political means are the best way to raise status and effect improvements than of religiously oriented methods (Zelliot 2001: 11; Larbeer 2003). Indeed, the assertions of the deprived sections in the society were mainly aimed to get a space in the mainstream civil domain i.e. shifting from a feudalistic exploitative system towards a society based on social equality and justice. This perception was based on the principles of Western modernity and the deprived sections on the whole anticipated emancipation through modernity. The influence of the Western missionaries is noted here. On the one hand, the movements were against the existing hierarchically ordered Hindu social system and, on the other hand, they had supported the dominant national movement. The mainstream nationalistic movement was aimed to establish a modern version of independent nation-state and civil society. These movements had progressed simultaneously. However, many extremist religious movements also progressed along with this.

During the colonial as well as the postcolonial period, the Congress used secularism as an ideology in order to accommodate different sections of the populations. However, the Congress was not a complete success in accommodating the diverse sections. The nationalist movement, in fact, progressed along the majoritarian lines also which had brought forth many contradictions, exclusions and insecurity complexes in the society. In spite of its secular character, most of its leaders had also used majoritarian norms and symbols for mobilising the mass. Mahatma Gandhi could be an example. Gandhi used the Hindu tradition against the colonialists, but he was not against any other religion. The Congress while sustaining secular lines urged for reconstructing the tradition-bound Indian society along the line of Western modernity. In order to attain that type of a ‘security community’ India must be liberated from the British rule. However, Gandhi’s position was one of challenging the leaders like Nehru. He had clear cut differences on matters of tradition, development, social mobility etc. In fact, the religious premise of Gandhi’s thinking and the use of religious norms for mobilisation had become inaccessible to certain
sections in the minority communities in India. Jinnah and his Muslim League viewed Gandhi’s method as ‘Hinduisation’ of the nationalist movement. Nehru and other secular leaders also felt uncomfortable with Gandhi’s method. The Urdu-Hindi controversy in 1872 in the central provinces (King 1994) and the cow protection movement by Dayananda Saraswati were the issues that alarmed the Muslims. During the nationalist struggle these problems became acute. Sajal Nag observed: the Muslim politicians feared that Hindu majoritarians which would emerge from the introduction of elections would further curb what many felt was an essential part of their religion. The growing assertion of the Hindus as the dominant community through various symbolic agitations also provoked a kind of insularity as well as stubborn collective self-assertion from the Muslim (Nag 1999:87).

The minority assertions, especially from the Muslim community were not a reflection of the will of the whole Muslim population in India; rather they reflected the interests of an elite class within the Muslim community. The Muslim elites, especially the north Indian landed elite, had always been preoccupied with the defence of its sectional interests (Ahmad 1997: 21). In fact, before 1940s there was no indication of a separate nation for Muslims, neither from the League nor from any significant number of individuals from that community. Jinnah’s presidential address to the Muslim League became a turning point. He viewed that Islam and Hinduism were two nationalities and because of this reason India was always divided into ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ segments (Hasan 1997: 60). The events since 1940 eventually made the partition inevitable. However, the partition riots further led to polarisations in society. Using this, the Hindu Rightist forces in India also began to take advantage.

**The Nature of Indian State and Development Paradigm**

The nature of Indian State and its path of development are critical factors in understanding the potential and limitations of the role of civil society. The development of capitalism in India is therefore a major factor. As mentioned earlier, colonialism and the advent of European capital was a crucial factor in the development of capitalism in India (Pavlov 1999; Buchanan 1934; Shah 1990; Shah 1986). In the course of colonialist expansion, an economic condition was created to facilitate the formation
of capitalist relations in India on a massive scale (Pavlov 1999). This was of considerable importance for the development of Indian capitalism. Initially, the British policies tended to impede the expansion of Indian domestic market that led to the underdevelopment of productive forces, and the capitalist classes in the country (Bagchi 1991: 8-9). The crisis of the British empire following the outbreak of the World War I and the growth of Indian nationalism in India provided new opportunities. The colonial administration was forced to change its policy and granted a measure of financial autonomy to India to protect some existing Indian industries against foreign competition (Bagchi 1982: 91-93). The colonisers were thus ready to build railways and establish a few industries. They also initiated commercialisation of certain agricultural products in their own interest. However, the limitations of the colonial office to control all activities pertaining to trade and other business compelled them to create a subservient class of bureaucrats and other officials in India who would serve them effectively.

Meanwhile, a few Indians had already made use of the business opportunities thrown open to them and began their career as traders. The Indian traders could not totally ignore their Indian identity. Alongside the British trade associations, many Indian trade associations were formed in the nineteenth century itself. The Indian businessmen, however, did not confine themselves to mere trade and commerce. They gradually began to engage themselves in the industrial field. To further their interests, they even organised themselves into associations such as Bombay Mill Owners’ Association (1875) and the Ahmedabad Mill Owners’ Association (1891). The economic nationalism that shook the country during the early nationalist phase gave an impetus to many nationalist-minded Indians to start their own industries (Srikanth 1994: 338-39).

The withdrawal of the British East India Company from commercial activity in 1833 had already prompted the native businessmen to organise an institution which would represent their business interest to the government. In 1833, the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce and in 1836, the Bombay and Madras Chamber of Commerce were formed. Nationalist leaders like M.G. Ranade took initiatives to organise the industrial association of Western India. Since 1905, the Congress started conducting
Indian Industrial Conferences along with its annual sessions. R.C. Dutt, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai et al. were the eminent nationalists who had associated with the conferences. The efforts culminated in the formation of the Indian Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1927. It was later changed to Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). It was recognised by the British government. The leaders of the Indian national movement were aware of the importance of the emerging capitalist class and also the leaders of this class had shown greater interest in political affairs (Mukherjee 2002:34-39). The position of the Indian capitalists was strategic. Aditya Mukherjee notes:

The Indian capitalist class’s strategy vis-à-vis imperialism was certainly one which remained within the bourgeois framework but was not at any point anti-national i.e., seeking and supporting social, economic and political concessions or reforms, wrested from or offered by the colonial government, or its preference for legal and constitutional opposition as against revolutionary, extra-legal opposition cannot be understood per se as its surrendering to imperialism. If it supported the colonial government on certain specific issues, this was in the nature of a tactical support to reforms within the system while maintaining a strategic opposition to the system as a whole (Ibid.: 51).

It may be noted that after World War I, significant changes were underway in the Indian economy which enabled the Indian capitalist class to grow and establish a considerably large independent economic base for capitalist accumulation (Mukherjee and Mukherjee 1990: 78). Despite several setbacks, especially during the period of the Great Depression, the Indian entrepreneurs made considerable progress. They established many factories in different parts of the country. Their progress can be seen from the fact that the number of Indian group companies had increased during the period from 172 to 366 (Markovitz 1985). The growing need of industrial finance and the indifferent attitude of the British government compelled Indians to start their own banks and insurance companies. The Indian industrial capitalist class had its “gestation in a laboratory of economic change, peculiar to itself, imposed by the colonial power.” Its emergence followed “complex interactions between the colonial power and the trading, landed and usurious components of the propertied classes that attained an established status” during the period (Satyamurthy 1994: 134).
However, the Indian capitalists had already become well aware of the importance of protective development of Indian capital under the shield of the State. The dependence on the foreign capital was the net result of the lack of basic industries, and the newly emerged class urged for a State-supported development. The aspiration for self-development had prompted the capitalists to actively support for setting up a national State. However, without having support from the feudal elements in the society successive struggle against the colonialists was not possible. The nexus between the emerging bourgeoisie and the nationalists had determined the future course of India’s development. It may be noted that earlier the Indian capitalist class did not take keen interest in the nationalist struggle started by the nationalist intelligentsia. Once the capitalist class strengthened its position, it began to play an active role in the freedom struggle and, by the mid-thirties, it became the most influential class on the anti-imperialist front. The capitalist class could easily exercise its influence on the Indian National Congress and became a decisive factor at the time of the transfer of power. The Indian business groups drew closer to the Indian National Congress, which was emerging as a mass movement aimed at putting an end to British rule. For its part, the Congress was committed to a policy of rapid industrialisation, which it believed would benefit the capitalist class too (Nehru 1993: 403).

The capitalist class in India had clearly recognised a critical role of the postcolonial State in India for capitalist development. During the early thirties and forties, a strategy of economic development was evolved within the Indian National Congress, which envisaged planned development as a critical factor. Even in the thirties, the Economic Affairs Committee of the Congress had admitted the possibility that the State might not be in a position to own all the crucial means of production. The perspective of the Indian business class in respect of a planned economy on the lines proposed by the Congress was reflected in the speech of A. R. Dalal, the President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce at the beginning of 1939. He said that the steps taken by the Congress in establishing a planning committee to survey and prepare the ground for the formation of an all-India scheme for India’s economic regeneration was a move in the right direction (Raj 1979: 333). During this time, the leading Indian
industrialists expected that the economic policy of the Congress would enable them to break out of the constraints imposed by the imperial framework of the economy.

In 1944, the leading men of Indian business and industry met in Bombay and proposed what was known as the ‘Bombay Plan’ for the development of India. The Plan had clearly recognised the necessity of active participation of the State in promoting industry. State ownership and State management of key sectors were accepted by them. The State intervention was welcomed as it would not bring about any radical changes in the relations of production (Thakurdas et al. 1944). Regarding the Bombay Plan, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that “revolutionary changes” were inherent in it and that it was “a welcome and encouraging sign of the way India must go.” The Plan was “based on a free India and on the political and economic unity of India” (Nehru 1993: 501). The post-independence political economy of India obviously reflected this thinking.

The Indian State was, however, not a mere product of capitalism. Unlike in the West, the emerging State undertook the task of social transformation (Kaviraj 1997:73), in accordance with the provisions of the newly enacted Constitution. The fundamental nature of the class configuration in the Indian society had forced the State to follow a well-balanced strategy in its dealings with the socio-economic power centres. The State had facilitated the capitalist development on the one hand, and to a greater extent preserved the pre-capitalist forces, on the other. This ‘passive revolution’ was the net result of the varied alliances made by the nationalists with the bourgeoisie and other dominant as well as subordinate classes, in their struggle against the colonial rule. This strategy was aimed to contain the class conflict (Chatterjee 2000:130-34). However, in this transformative process the State had ‘slowed down’ the social and land reforms (Palshikar 2004:148-49). Under the provisions of the Indian Constitution, the land reforms and agricultural policies were assigned to the States, while the central government’s power was assigned to the rural sector (Hassan 2000:17). In this scenario of power sharing, the central government gradually withdrew from the task of social transformation and focused on the strengthening of the national bourgeoisie. The post-independent State had followed the proposals of the ‘Bombay Plan’ which demanded for the
replacing of the foreign capital to national bourgeoisie (Patnaik 2000:142). This new institutional and policy change integrated the bourgeoisie as a national class, and provided sufficient space for the autonomous development of capitalism with State patronage. At the same time the national state allowed the pre-capitalist forces to sustain their autonomous existence without much alteration.

The political economy of Indian State, as it has historically evolved, was an important factor in determining the economic and trade policies of post-independent governments. However, scholars still differed on questions concerning the nature of State and its development dynamics. The debate on the mode of production in India, initiated later, had thrown open many critical questions about the nature of Indian State and its developmental path (Patnaik 1990; Chattopadhyay 1972). Pranab Bardhan argued that the industrial bourgeoisie was the ‘dominant proprietary class’ and the ‘principal beneficiary’ of State policies in India. This class supported the government policy of encouraging import-substituting industrialisation, quantitative trade restrictions providing automatically protected domestic markets, and of running a large public sector providing capital goods, intermediate products and infrastructural facilities for private industry (Bardhan 1998: 40-41). Budhadev Bhattacharya asserted that the transfer of political power was from the imperialist rulers to the newly constituted ruling party representing the interests of the Indian capitalist class marked the beginning of the domination of the Indian bourgeoisie over the politico-economic structure in the country (Bhattacharya 1990: 141). Describing the “autonomy of the Indian State” as a “striking and unique fact,” Achin Vanaik argued there was no major capitalist country in the Third World which had a more powerful State than India’s or an indigenous bourgeoisie with more autonomy from foreign capital (Vanaik 1990: 15).

According to Bardhan, in the first decades after 1947, “the state elite in India enjoyed enormous prestige and sufficiently unified sense of ideological purpose about the desirability of using state intervention to promote national economic development - it redirected and restructured economy, and in the process exerted pressures on proprietary classes. However, over the years, the autonomous behaviour of the State was
reflected more often in its regulatory rather than its developmental role (Bardhan 1998: 38-39). At the time of independence the basic infrastructure necessary for the development was very weak. The private sector did not have the ability to undertake any large-scale industrialisation on its own, particularly in the basic industries. The Indian capitalist class did not have adequate finance, technology and expertise to establish large-scale industries, which needed long gestation periods. The Indian capitalist class was thus well aware of its limitations. As discussed earlier, even before independence, the Indian capitalist class provided general guidelines for planned economic development to be implemented after independence. Both the National Planning Committee set up by the Indian National Congress and the Bombay Plan prepared by the leading Indian industrialists underlined need of active participation of the State in promoting Indian industry (Nehru 1983:111 and 114). The extent to which the State could play a dominant role in the process of development depended upon the constellation of class forces in the post-independence period. The main issue was whether the apparatus of State power should be directed towards building an indigenous capitalist class (Sobhan 1984: 247). However, the State became the principal instrument to mobilise domestic resources, foreign aid and loans, and to provide the necessary guarantee to foreign capital, to retain their investments and make new investments in the domestic economy. This reflected the Keynesian approach to the role of the State in the capitalist development (Keynes 1957).

The notion of Welfare State was thus put in place to legitimise the capitalist path of development. The successive governments in India acclaimed the concept of mixed economy in high terms. Commenting on the subject, Jawaharlal Nehru said that those countries which did not want either of the two (capitalist or socialist) extremes “must find a middle way.” In that middle way, there was bound to be more emphasis on some factors than on others but obviously a middle way or a mixed economy was inevitable. He said that the private sector in India did not have the strength or capacity to undertake large-scale industrialisation and hence “the state inevitably has to take them up” (Nehru 1983b: 45-48). Reflecting the Keynesian approach to capitalist development strategy, Nehru said: “Every modern economic theory today bases itself, unlike the previous
ones, on full employment in the country. We cannot produce employment by legislation. Our economic approach must be such that we can reach a stage of full employment within a measurable period of time” (Nehru 1983c: 63).

The role of the State was further underlined in India’s Industrial Policy Resolutions of 1948 and 1956 by which the State was expected to intervene in areas where, for various reasons, the private sector could not carry out the task alone (Thakur 1994: 135). However, these Resolutions were not opposed to tolerating foreign capital as a means of importing industrial technique and technical knowledge. Within two decades of independence, private foreign capital had come to play a considerable part in the organised sector of the Indian economy. The foreign exchange crisis in the second half of the 1950s further forced the government to change its attitude towards the foreign capital. Planning was also envisaged on the assumption that foreign capital would enable the economy to circumvent the problems posed by foreign trade and would lift the economy from low growth rate equilibrium. The attitude towards foreign capital thus became one of enthusiastic welcome (Nehru 1983c: 83). The annual session of the FICCI held in March 1959 had also called for substantial foreign investment, which represented an important point of departure for a remoulding of India’s economic policy (Thakur 1994:134).

Notwithstanding the strategies employed to sustain the interest of both domestic and foreign capital, India’s industrial growth, on the whole, was losing momentum in the 1960s with a better performing industrial sectors showing signs of decline. By 1967, the growth of all kinds of industries had slowed down and this continued for almost a decade (Swamy 1994: 94-95). The agriculture sector also experienced serious problems, which ultimately resulted in the launching of the Green Revolution that facilitated the penetration of foreign capital in different areas. But the Green Revolution too failed to resolve the contradiction in the Indian agriculture sector (Sharma 77-102).

Meanwhile, it was argued that the monopoly nature of Indian capitalism led to inefficiency in production. The concentration and centralisation of wealth and means of production increased during the successive plan
periods. The policy of import substitution industrialisation amounted to a policy of protecting inefficient and monopolist producers. This was the time when Indian monopoly bourgeoisie began to collaborate with multinational corporations for technology and capital and also for getting an edge in the internal and external markets. The intra-capitalist conflicts and differences would soon begin to surface in the aftermath of the crises of the sixties, of which India’s war with China in 1962, the India-Pakistan war in 1965, and the agricultural crisis occasioned by the severe drought of 1965-67 were the most far-reaching and serious. The impacts of the military and agricultural crises were further compounded by the industrial crisis, though it was clearly more than a mere industrial crisis. This was the retrogression in the rate of growth of the Indian economy, which began from the mid-sixties and reached alarming proportions by the early seventies (Baru 1983: 39; Patnaik and Rao 1977; Patnaik 1981). Bardhan explained the crisis in terms of the State’s inability to reconcile the conflicting objectives of the proprietary classes. He argued that the role of the State had been to mediate between the dominant proprietary classes by evolving a system of subsidies to adjust and accommodate the conflicting pressures of big industrialists, rich farmers and the professionals in the public sector. According to Bardhan, a combination of stagnant aggregate surplus and the growing concessions extracted by the proprietary classes had caused the decline of public investment, which adversely affected industrial growth. The bloated bureaucracy intensified this crisis (Bardhan 1998).

Another analysis of the developments over the 1965-74 period depicted the Indian economy as one exhibiting semi-feudal relations of exploitation over a large area and dominated by dependent bureaucratic capital. It said that capital accumulation was constrained by feudal as well as foreign pressures. The State attempted to overcome these constraints within the framework of monopoly capitalism and activated new forces of production. In the process, the prevailing balance of economic forces was drastically altered (KB 1975). Dilip S. Swamy, however, contended that this view underestimated the role of external constraints. According to him, during the mid-60s, the external constraints in the form of trade and credit became binding and that continued unabated for the next two decades.
until the economy was completely liberated from State regulations (Swami 1994: 119).

Thus the trends in the Indian economy clearly suggested that the slowdown in industrial growth during 1965-75 was mainly due to the slackening of public investment at a time when the demand generated by import substitution under sheltered market was tapering off. The poor performance of agriculture and unchanged income distribution constrained the growth of the home market throughout the period. These constraints and the exhaustion of import substitution possibilities were the necessary condition for industrial stagnation. The slowdown of public investment proved to be the decisive one. The industrial class nevertheless failed to acquire prime quality capital and an autonomous capacity for self-expansion even after fifteen years of growth. It continued to be dependent on the State as also on foreign capital and technology for further expansion. Its bureaucratic character and dependence on the State did not change much (Srinivasan and Narayanan 1977).

The 1969 split in the Congress Party and the anti-monopoly legislation and bank nationalisation, which followed, were seen by some observers as representing a shift in the balance of power from the monopoly bourgeoisie to smaller capitalists. Addressing the Indian Merchants Chamber in Bombay on 25 October 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said, “...exercising a countervailing influence against the concentration of economic power, Government had to step in, whether it is nationalization of banks or the monopolies legislation, which is now on the anvil. All these should be viewed against the realities of our economy in which there is no effective force, except the state, which could mitigate the possible abuses of the concentration of economic power” (India, Indira Gandhi 1983: 258).

However, the pressures resulting from the oil crisis of 1973–74 set the background for economic liberalisation in India. When the government decided to borrow from the IMF to cover the external deficit, the IMF seized the opportunity to ensure a decisive change in India’s economic policies. The Planning Commission had also adopted a pragmatic approach towards licensing and controls. By 1974, the policy constraints were no longer there. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was able to enlist mass support
and the reins of power had also been tightened. It was an opportune moment for taking the IMF loan, which became the catalyst for resolving the prolonged economic crisis (Swami 1994: 146-47). Thus, by the mid 1970s, the policy of import substitution was relegated to the background and the emphasis shifted to import-led export or export-led growth. Meanwhile, the development of monopoly capitalism created many contradictions in the Indian society. Contradictions between different sections of the dominant classes, and most strikingly between the urban bourgeoisie as a whole and the class of capitalist farmers in the process of formation of certain regions, were becoming increasingly sharp. This intensified the exploitation of the direct producers. In the rural areas the process of capitalist transformation resulted in increased landlessness and often worsened conditions for agricultural labour (Mitra 1977).

The declaration of emergency in 1975 marked a new phase in the transformation of the Indian State. It served to conceal the contradictions between different sections of the Indian society. The Indira Gandhi government unleashed repression and violence even disregarding the constitutional obligations. Under the emergency the Indian government hoped to activate forces that would break the deadlock between the belligerent proprietary classes and stimulate growth. It wanted the bureaucracy to work efficiently, workers to increase production, state governments to carry out land reforms etc. Bardhan said that as tensions and frustrations with the old patronage system built up, the legitimacy of the political machine declined, the hegemonic hold of the dominant proprietary classes over the subordinate classes started slipping away even while their economic grip remained strong and some partners in the dominant coalition started looking for more centralised forms of arbitration. Bardhan pointed out that Indira Gandhi was too eager to provide a leadership in this centralised arbitration process. A.G. Frank noted that the institutionalisation of economic, political, and military repression under Indira Gandhi’s emergency rule was designed to further favour Indian and foreign monopoly capital without solving the country’s structural problems (Frank 1985: 27). Measures introduced during this time such as tax reductions and liberalisation of trade policies were most encouraging for profitable business, both Indian and foreign. The import policy for 1976-77 carried the country another giant step in the free
market direction and away from planning, as with the industrial licensing it was difficult to say what remained of import control (RBI 1976: 198-201). According to Rajni Kothari, “on the policy front there emerged a highly sophisticated package. In the mid-seventies the World Bank announced the strategy of ‘direct attack on poverty’ (which neatly coincided with India’s call of garibi hatao). This gave the bank and foreign aid a strategic role in national development” (Kothari 1990: 119).

During the period of Janata rule (1977-79), the economic stagnation was apparently over and public investment in key sectors had pushed many industries up and out of stagnation. This was aided by the strict regulation of industrial relations and good harvest during this period. Dilip Swamy noted that the government tried to reorient the economy by allocating more resources to agriculture and rural development and by assigning a special place to small-scale industries (Swami 1994: 171-72). But, according to A.G. Frank, this change was “more rhetorical than real” and the temporary economic fortunes of this period would not alter anything fundamental in India’s structural economic crisis (Frank 1985: 37). Nonetheless, the big business, whose position had improved considerably during the emergency, began to denounce the Janata policies as amounting to de-industrialise the country. When it became unresponsive in terms of new investment, the government attempted to offer concessions but that did not yield desired results (Nayar 1989: 343). However, the Janata government collapsed due to its own internal contradictions and, as Dilip Swamy noted, the coalition, which accorded increasing power to the rich farmers, appeared “incongruent with the relative economic position of the underlying class forces” (Swami 1994: 172).

The 1980s witnessed major decisions, which greatly changed the political economy of the Indian State, reoriented industrial production, altered class alignments and prepared the ground for a far-reaching transition. The major features of the new policy regime that took shape in the 1980s were deregulation of industries, decontrol of prices, liberalisation of imports, tax reductions, downsizing of welfare funds and increase in deficit spending. These trends, which had emerged immediately after the 1974 low conditionality IMF loan, got crystallised into a coherent package in the
early 1980s when India had gone in for another IMF loan. This was followed by various initiatives to further liberalise the economy in accordance with the recommendations of various official committees. Throughout the eighties, the Indian economy experienced a deepening integration with world economy and foreign capital and ever since it became susceptible to international economic fluctuations over which it could exercise no control whatsoever (Patnaik 1994: 683-90; Patnaik 1995; Bhagwati 1993; Sachs 1999).

The Civil Society in Postcolonial India

It is imperative to understand the Indian experiences with liberal democracy before analysing the nature and dynamics of the civil society. The sources of much of the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding the conceptualisation of civil society and its practices in contemporary India lie with the problem of the construction of Indian modernity (Mohanty 2006). When India became independent, there already existed a well-developed and relatively mature civil society, which was anti-colonial in nature, but also elitist in character—comprised by mostly Western educated leaders (Adlakha 2001: 177). In fact, they were the people who led the phase of nation-building process in the independent India. The nationalist elite maintained that the objectives of building a modern and prosperous nation guided by the principles of secularism, central planning, and democratic socialism could only be attained under the guidance of a strong democratic State that would be an exemplar and social arbiter, and play the key role in maintaining political stability and spearheading the nation’s strategy of self-reliant economic development.

However, it became quite clear soon that although the nationalist leaders sought to trigger a social change for the better through constitutional democracy, their efforts did not bring forth positive results altogether (Mohanty 2006). Commenting on this social dilemma, Sudipta Kaviraj pointed out that the leaders like Nehru expected that the “ordinary Indians would acquire a democratic consciousness, which would ultimately cease to identify themselves through traditional caste categories and demand greater economic equality. Democratic institutions would thus lead, in the long term, to modernist movements for reduction of poverty” (Kaviraj 2003: 158). Kaviraj also delineated how the Nehruvian State was not only
negligent about the cultural reproduction of the nation but it performed miserably by failing to create conditions for a common sense in Indian politics. What happened in the political history of India was not a melting away of tradition under the powerful light of modernist enlightenment. Those institutions of modernity, like the State, which had to be accepted as part of the modern condition, have been dealt with through a traditionally intelligible grid of social identity and action. The Constitutional system in India, therefore, was consistent with the internal principles of liberal constitutionalism, but inconsistent with the self-understanding of social groups. The national State simply assumed that citizens would act as liberal individuals, but failed to set in motion a cultural process, which could provide the great masses of people the means of acquiring such self-understanding (Kaviraj 1995: 311).

Meghnad Desai argued that the Nehru government did not take any meaningful steps to abolish the caste system with its inegalitarian logic of hierarchy and status; rather the society was allowed to reform itself in a rather laissez-faire way which he called ‘social conservatism’ (Desai 2005). In the economic sphere, the State-led policies ultimately led to a slow growth output and employment and persistence of poverty and inequality through the first phase of 30 years. With the slow growth of jobs in the private sector, government jobs at all levels became much sought after and democratic electoral system was harnessed to provide this kind of patronage. How this patronage was garnered through the-then existing political-organisational strategy was explained by Myron Weiner. He said that at this point in time, ‘party building’ involved nothing more than adapting to local power structures. The Congress relied primarily on the support and cooperation of the local landowning interests—in particular, on the village landlords and the rich and upper strata of the middle peasantry, to organise the party cadres and mobilise the grassroots support for the Party. According to Weiner, in its effort to win, the Congress adapted to the local power structure. It recruited from among those who had local power and influence. The result was a political system with considerable tension between a government concerned with modernising the society and economy and a party seeking to adapt itself to the local environment to win elections (Weiner 1967: 15). When these relations of dependence grew stronger, the wider district, state, and
national party organizations came increasingly to represent a complex pyramid of hierarchical alliances between the dominant rural interests and the Congress Party. In effect, from very early on, the party structure, process, and policy, came to represent the dominant landowning class and castes. Such a political-organisational strategy not only precluded a challenge to the normative and institutional foundations of the traditional social, economic, and political hierarchies, but also undermined the pressures from below that could have effectively challenged the hegemony of the powerful groups and classes dominating the Congress system (Sharma 2003:67; Mohanty 2006).

Moreover, this so-called ‘Congress System’ not only absorbed State into its fold of strategic functioning, but also made the State to act as the ‘Political Leader of Ruling Classes’. The State created the conditions of the reproduction of the ruling classes. First, its law and coercive organisational apparatus ensured the protection of the propertied classes against possible attack by the exploited masses. Second, its fiscal policies fulfilled the material interests of the ruling class fractions such as the big bourgeoisie, regional bourgeoisie landlords and the rich peasantry. Its political programme established their coalition in order to effectively negotiate with struggles by subaltern masses. Third, its dominant ideology engendered the formation of the nation, civil society and ‘modern’ economic classes by restructuring the pre-capitalist social institutions such as caste, tribe, nationality and patriarchy. In these three important realms, the State performed the decisive role—that explains why it must be characterised as the political leader of ruling classes” (Patnaik 1990: 29; Mohanty 2006).

This interaction of various social conservatism and economic radicalism in the context of political democracy led to non-elite groups getting organised and they did this through their caste/regional identities. Linguistic states had to be created during the 1950s in response to popular pressure from the local capitalists as well as local middle classes who wanted public jobs and public contracts. Next came the 1960s, and the pressure from the rural areas to divert resources to agriculture; this led to the launching of Green Revolution with input subsidies as well as price guarantees for outputs. But even then the discontent due to slow growth-
rate continued. This broke into floods of protest from tribal, Dalit and lower caste groups in the 1970s, and were brought together under the Lokyan banner (Desai 2005:100; Mohanty 2006).

This was the backdrop, which fostered a sense of urgency within all ‘dispossessed’ (Dalits and other marginalised sections etc) to launch various modes of dissent from all fronts against the various governmental distributive agencies of ‘scarce resources’ (Mohanty 2006). During such precarious socio-political situations “social blocs may form, each with its own panoply of associations, to battle for the control of the state (as it was the case during the assertion of Naxalite Movement); political forces may forge powerful ties with community organizations and civil associations, polarizing society and at times threatening the ‘order’ that incumbents so cherish (as the Jayaprakash Narayan-led ‘Total Revolution’ formed ties with students organisation to fight corruption (Foley and Edwards 1996: 46; Mohanty 2006).

While the protests addressed material needs, they soon became attached to several larger ideological movements, which challenged the Congress-led government. The threat became so potent that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in June 1975 declared the country to be in a state of emergency, which remained until the elections in 1977. The experience of emergency thus, in fact, broke the complacency of the people who had taken democracy and its benevolence much too for granted. More than common people it was a setback to the educated middle class, who realized overnight that the state could also take their rights away. Eventually, the people restored democracy by bringing into power the Janata Party in 1977. The emergency and the restoration of democracy not only redefined and extended the boundaries of civil society, by redefining the relationship of citizens with the state it also restructured civil society in a significant way, and made it more alert to the transgression of its boundary hereafter by the state. Understandably, the most important consequence of the emergency for civil society was the question concerning the collapse of State institutions and their inability to protect the rights of the citizens. The civil rights movement had until then remained confined to piecemeal addressing of issues such as the suppression of Naxalites. The emergency galvanised the movement, as democracy, citizenship and constitutional
protection of fundamental rights overnight became important issues for public debate. The People’s Union for Civil Liberty and People’s Union for Democratic Rights were two leading organizations formed in reaction to this in the post-Emergency phase (Desai 1986: 91-95, 96-102).

While the Emergency meant a breach with the Indian democratic practice, and a severe curtailment of civil and political rights (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 6-7), it also had a revitalising effect on civil society which after 1977 witnessed an increase of activities within traditional social movements such as peasants, workers and students, but also amongst the new social movements, including environmental groups and women’s organisations (Omvedt 1994; Shah 1990; Parajuli 1991). Mobilising new political identities, these groups challenged the State on local, regional and national level, as these NGOs were often based in strong grassroots networks. While the emphasis on environmentalism and gender issues was also a global phenomenon of this period. The oppression of the State certainly provoked social and political forces to organise against the oppression. The image of a democratic and progressive State was also seriously dented. As a consequence, new groups understood the necessity to actively claim their rights and to fight against perceived injustices. State developmentalism as a project was questioned, and from the 1980s onward, the Indian State itself had encouraged NGOs to take more responsibility for social development. The number of NGOs in India was growing all the time (Baviskar 2000). The neoliberal reforms of the IMF and the World Bank which have had such drastic global consequences in the Third World have affected India also where the partial withdrawal of the State resulted in a more active civil society.

It is apparent that the partial failure of the State to address social and economic needs has had effects on the levels of development, but also on the quality and character of civil society. In some sense this failure has spurred groups and individuals to engage in civil society, but the inability to provide basic education and other forms of social services has seriously hampered the development of civil society, with low levels of literacy being a case in point. As a consequence, the Indian State and various aid agencies have utilised the competence and infrastructure of civil society in order to encourage social development. NGOs such as women’s
organisations have been incorporated in the governmental development plans. But this form of cooptation, as well as the general trend of State withdrawal also has important consequences for future plans of social development.

While the State is increasingly seen as inefficient and corrupt, the NGOs are defined as committed and accountable. Leaving the negative description of the State aside, the positive image of civil society rests more on an ideological and theoretical definition rather than an accurate appraisal of civil society in India today. Due to the inherent social, religious, ethnic and economic cleavages of Indian society, the civil society is permeated by inequality and various forms of conflict, as noted in the current Indian debate (Mahajan 1999; Saberwal 2001). The expectations of efficiency, commitment and accountability of civil society should be seen in this light also, as various forms of inequality are likely to influence civil society. A more realistic view would be to define Indian civil society as a public arena in which various interests meet and compete, battling against the State, but also against other groups within civil society. This arena would be affected also by the power relations in society at large, reproducing various cleavages and inequalities.

The relative failure of the Indian State created feelings of exclusion amongst large segments of the population, and there were allegations that the State is not neutral, but biased on the basis of class and caste interests (Berglund 2009). These alleged biases have, in turn, created sentiments of apathy and also facilitated negative mobilisation and manipulation of various primordial identities such as ethnicity, religion and caste. This segmentation of Indian society has had ambiguous consequences and has led to demands and actions which have seriously undermined the democratic system by the strengthening of exclusivist identities. These are based on religion, caste or ethnicity and are now at the centre of political mobilisation, which involves political parties as well as other parts of Indian civil society. Amir Ali suggests that the colonial experience included the development of a public sphere, but that the private sphere was left not to the individual citizens, but to the native elites. According to Ali this resulted in the cementing of the community based identities also after independence, which has obstructed a democratisation of Indian society,
with the current Hindu nationalist challenge as a case in point (Ali 2001). The success of this movement is most evident within party politics, where the main Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in the 1980s and 1990s developed from a marginal party to the dominant force of Indian politics. The ideology of the party is a form of cultural nationalism based on the idea of Hindu supremacy and a rejection of the multiculturalism of the Indian nation.

For any long term analysis of the impact of this Hindu nationalist challenge it is, however, necessary to include its work within civil society, where it has been continuously working for a redefinition of the established Indian democracy. The movement used civil society to strengthen the Hindu identity and to weaken the position of the minorities, undermining the secular Indian democracy. It is in many senses a struggle of ideology and meaning, reminiscent of the Gramscian definition of the continuous battles in civil society where the outcome cannot be explained solely by class interest and economic power. The Hindu nationalist challenge was also met with resistance from other sectors of civil society, in an attempt to defend the established forms of democracy and minority rights (Berglund 2009). The case of the Hindu nationalist expansion is one example of how the concept of civil society can be applied, without accepting the liberal civil society theory (Berglund 2009). The importance of the sphere ‘civil society’ is recognised but defined more along the confrontational and ideological lines.

According to Javeed Alam, India has been witnessing “the unhealthy sight of a civil society fighting for self-maximization,” which marked absence of inter-community exertions for common good” (Alam 2004: 129). The colonial and postcolonial political practices had very much crystallised the communities and today they act as power blocs in the competitive power politics. Alam notes:

There was the breakdown of the internal harmony of Indian society. The happy coexistence of numerous small communities, each living with minimal interaction but cordial understandings could no more be taken for granted. Nor was it replaced with competitive coexistence. Rather the breakdown of the old had happened without the emergence and availability of any clear mediating principles. An advantage of one
community was more often viewed as the disadvantage of the other. Conflicts between communities become the normal pattern in which first the colonial administration and then the Indian state became the arbiter (Ibid.: 78-79).

The struggle for scarce resources thus reduced the possibility for inter-subjective interactions. The communalising of the civil domain naturally became a major challenge to democratic norms and practices. According to Mustapha Kamal Pasha, religious resurgence is “an inversion of modernisation, from previously state-directed social engineering to a project of social transformation that takes civil society as the instrument and site to reshape political society.” He says that the rise of the middle classes and the consolidation of mass media are two major factors linking religious resurgence to civil society. These must be situated within the context of growing cultural divisions and declining State capacity, which bestow civil society a new status (Pasha 2004: 136-37). However, this new status needs to be critically analysed given the nature of representation, articulation, and mobilisation that threaten the very social fabric of a country like India. The case of the Hindu Right assertion in the 1980s and 1990s and all its attendant problems are placed for critical scrutiny in the following chapters.