

## Conclusion

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The three distinct cases presented here (village boundary disputes, Velamas of the nineteenth century, and weavers and the "weaver" category), as well as the method offered by the history of the petition, are meant to serve as the basis for suggesting the ultimate and real possibilities of category creation from the colonized periphery. That historical set of possibilities for category creation also indicates that the potential power of the periphery to participate in the construction of systems such as colonialism is significant. Telugu sources give us no absolutely privileged insight into this process. They imply, however, that if it could happen in these local cases, then it could and probably did happen all over India in the nineteenth century. Finding such instances as prevalent here in Telugu areas presents a stronger argument for that wider case.

It has been the intention of this work in general to suggest that the systems of social and political control we see in nineteenth-century India were produced as much by Indians as they were imposed by the British. Embarking on such a course required steering away from any one specific notion of what colonialism meant in the early nineteenth century. The by-product of problematizing the dominance of colonialism and (later) nationalism, it turns out, is a history that permits excellent access to category production and identity formation by the colonized, and that eventually allows for much greater insight into pertinent issues of the late twentieth century — the strong fissiparous tendencies rife throughout Indian society and in direct opposition to the postcolonial Indian state.

Many of the social and political problems of the postcolonial state were adumbrated as early as the first decades of the twentieth century in the regional politics that manifested themselves throughout South Asia; these can be seen as the results of constructions of categories produced under the conditions of colonialism. A prime example of those tensions is evident in the working through of a nationalist agenda in southern India. <sup>1</sup> In fact, the case of Tamil areas may be even more pronounced than Telugu-speaking regions. <sup>2</sup> Yet Telugu areas offer their own evidence as well. And, of course, the most significant example is that the first real political challenge to postcolonial ideas of national unity arose soon after independence in Telugu areas in the form of the movement to create the Telugu-speaking state of Andhra Pradesh. <sup>3</sup> The fact of Andhra Pradesh's becoming the first language-based state in India speaks as much to the failure of the ability of the nation to supplant local identity as it does to the specific claims of the revolt in the name of Telugu-ness.

Nor was this in any way a novel phenomenon for Telugu speakers. In 1921 Gandhi had earlier faced the proposition of regional assertions of cultural categories (the same assertions that would emerge after independence) but

had scoffed at the idea that they held any legitimacy. In a speech of that year given at Kakinada, Gandhi chastised Telugu speakers: "Telugus have cut themselves off from India by not learning Hindustani. I feel humiliated to have to speak in English before a vast audience like this which understands not a word of English and I wish you would consider it shameful that not a single one of you can translate my simple, broken Hindustani." <sup>4</sup> The eventual response, of course, after "Telugus" had, for a time, rallied around the nationalist cause, was Poti Sri Ramulu's fast to death for and the tidal wave of support received for the cause of Telugu statehood in the early 1950s. No amount of "shaming" Telugu speakers into a nationalist mold was going to work. Local collectivities had tremendous power in potentia, to use Marshall Sahlins's phrase, despite the struggles of a postindependence Nehruvian nation-state bent on asserting its unity, just as those local units had actually produced a negotiated system in the face of the colonial edifice earlier.

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The general situation of false unities at the level of the postcolonial nation-state has attracted the attention of numerous scholars. That state is the focal point of research into the nature of hegemony, dominance, and the functioning of the subsequent discourses that the state seeks to promote. Yet that situation, which is perhaps only a "most-pronounced-case" scenario of the homogeneity of Indian-ness being posited for all Indians, is also replicated at regional levels. State governments in India too have made attempts to impose contingent homogeneities. In Andhra Pradesh this has taken the form in one instance of the series of statues conspicuously erected along Tank Bandh in the capital, Hyderabad. Those statues were intended to represent the figures who account for the existence of a supposed homogeneity based on "Andhra-ness" (not even "Telugu-ness"). <sup>5</sup> The very notion of this kind of solidarity probably stretches the imagination of anyone trying to identify with it. However, it takes on truly improbable dimensions when we learn the actual identities of the figures represented by the statues. For the most part these people were connected to Telugu literature — chiefly Telugu poets (a problematic connection to begin with, especially in Muslim/Urdu Hyderabad). But there are a few other statues adding to the oddness of the collection. The main political figure is the statue of Sri Krishnadevaraya, the sixteenth-century chief of the Vijayanagara empire, whose base, Hampi, is in present day Karnataka, the Kanada-language state. And one statue is of Sir Arthur Cotton, "a great humanitarian," the English Madras civil servant responsible for the construction of a canal network in the Godavari River basin, canals that, it is claimed, brought an enormous leap in prosperity to the those areas. A collection of statues at Visakhapatnam, even more improbable in its purported unity, accentuates the difficulty of imposing solidarities from above, the difficulty for the center of creating categories.

These collections (lists) of people at Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam are attempts at the construction of identities that bridge religion, nationality, and even language in the hopes of promoting "Andhra-ness" and "North Coastal Andhra Indian-ness," respectively. But they are probably as thoroughly (mis)understood here as Gandhi's attempts at Indian-ness were

in the 1920s. In fact, the lists of statues serve as almost comical inverses of lists framed by Telugu speakers of the nineteenth century who sought to achieve local political goals and form solidarities. Those earlier lists, in defiance of definitions and unities attempted by the center, represented the strength and courage of the margin in its own fashioning of productive categories. The feebleness, for instance, of the "Andhra" label implied by the statues in Hyderabad represents the weakness of the center and its inability to impose successfully categories from above. Furthermore, we can see precisely from such a contemporary example how important it is to question the underpinnings of previously conceived of simple historical impositions of normative ideas. Cultural categories are indeed tricky things, and are certainly not arrived at easily — whether from above or from below.

Finally, the most difficult contemporary problem of conceiving of "identity" as a strategic unit for interpretation is that it has until recently been associated with the one lone identity postulated by the nation-state itself — the national identity. Edward Said's article "Identity, Negation and Violence" makes this exclusive connection in a drastic fashion. He writes, "Thus terror emanates from any attempt to live beyond the social confinements of identity itself; and terror is also the means used to quell the disorderliness of the unconfined human being." <sup>6</sup> Clearly, his position negates "identity" as a productive mechanism of the periphery. Said's characterization also replicates the general misconception of knowledge production he offered ten years earlier in *Orientalism*. In both works he insists that the center and periphery are distinctly and absolutely identifiable. He gives no account of the center's makeup as the result of the historical incorporation therein of epistemologies produced at the margin.

In the contemporary contest between stable identity as it is rendered by such affirmative agencies as nationality, education, tradition, language and religion, on the one hand, and all sorts of marginal, alienated or, in Immanuel Wallerstein's phrase, anti-systemic forces on the other, there remains an incipient and unresolved tension. One side gathers more dominance and centrality, the other is pushed further from the center, toward either violence or new forms of authenticity like fundamentalist religion. In any event, the tension produces a frightening consolidation of patriotism, assertions of cultural superiority mechanisms of control, whose power and ineluctability reinforce what I have been describing as the logic of identity. <sup>7</sup>

It may certainly be true that at any moment the fragment or subaltern can be pointed out for domination by an existing center. Over time, however, it becomes extremely difficult to perceive clear lines of division between margin and center, between colonizer and colonized, even between British and Indian or European and Oriental. This very lack of a strictly ascertainable set of differences makes looking at the production of categories (and not just at the exertion of power by some over others) the most efficacious way to gain insight into the nature of the dominance observable at any one moment in

any given system. And for those who have forgotten the power of the periphery (again, Chatterjee's "once-colonized" comes to mind) this is the ray of light, the self-empowering mechanism to contest the ideas of domination, victimization, and objectification that historiographies of "subalterns" necessarily perpetuate.

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There is more to the engagement of the politics of culture than tactics of opposition. There exist entire dynamics of productive negotiations that make villagers, Velamas, weavers, and others powerful in their assertions of categories for the self. Thus even with the "big" categories of class, caste, and nationalism being in place by the end of the nineteenth century, the identities that villagers, Velamas, weavers, and many others not documented here had developed persisted and thrived. The construction of meanings across boundaries had been these Telugu speakers' modus operandi for local identity formation all along. Transcendent meanings for the national level did not destroy these local expressions and epistemologies.

Does this mean that we can no longer speak of the nation, caste, colonialism, and the like? Are we again faced with a solipsistic dilemma? This work has tried to suggest that this need not be the case. The ability to write about these larger systems, those formulated so as to provide labels that ultimately ignore wide ranges of local meanings, must, however, be recognized as being produced not by what the sources tell us but by what historians bring to the sources, and by how those historians arrogate to themselves the power to give voice to Indians. Granting subjectivity to the historical subject is not a glib and idealistic proposal for a new historiography. It allows us both to see the full extent of local productions of categories and to come to terms with the degrees to which epistemologies are produced from all points in a system. Recognizing the subjectivity of the subject is a real project that should engage every scholar, especially those who seek to explain history in terms of categories that are not problematized in terms of that subjectivity.

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### Notes:

**Note 1:** Of course, such tensions were also present in North India. See, among others who have identified these issues for the North, Gyanendra Pandey, "Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-1922," in *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi, 1982): 143-197; and Shahid Amin, "Gandhi As Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2," in *Subaltern Studies III* (New Delhi, 1984): 1-61. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** Eugene Irschick's two works *Politics and Social Conflict in South India* (Berkeley, 1969), and *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s* (Madras, 1986), and Sumati Ramaswami's "En/gendering Language: The Poetics and Politics of Tamil Identity, 1891-1970" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1992), offer examples of problems with the idea of a simple inclusion of Tamil speakers into nationalist programs. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** For a general discussion of the events leading to the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh, see P. Raghunadha Rao, *History of Modern Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi, 1991),. 152-154. [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** Mahatma Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 19 (Delhi, 1958), 512. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** See appendix 1B, "Notes on Nationalism," note 8. [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** Edward Said, "Identity, Negation and Violence," *New Left Review* 171 (Sept./Oct. 1988): 55. [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** Said, "Identity, Negation and Violence," 55-56. [Back.](#)

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