1 Seeing the state

Introduction

We have said that one aim of this book is to consider how differently placed men and women see the state in rural India. Some of these individuals will be employees of the state, or external advisers to the Government of India and its constituent states and Union territories, although many more will be farmers or labourers. Some will be political fixers and members of the Backward Classes, while others will be farmers, Class IV government servants and *adivasis* at the same time. But what does it mean to talk about 'seeing the state'?

We are used to the idea of the state seeing its population or citizenry. Visuality is at the heart of many theories of power and governmentality. Michel Foucault, most notably, has shown how the birth of modern forms of education and welfare provision corresponds to the emergence of biopolitics as a 'form of politics entailing the administration of the processes of life of populations' (Dean 1999: 98). Populations emerge when changes in working practices give rise to economic government and the discipline of political economy, and they get bounded by new exercises in mapping and measurement, including the production of censuses, cadastral surveys and expeditions.[1] Biopolitics then refers to those government interventions that seek to improve the quality of a population as a whole, and these procedures produce that which we name the state as the effect of these interventions. These can be 'positive' and related to questions of public health and standards of living, or even to incarceration for the purposes of reform or improvement. Such interventions might involve the inspection of men, women and children by state officials or agencies contracted by the state. Children, for example, might be required to attend for eye examinations or inoculations. Prison cells might be searched for illegal substances. But they can also be 'negative', as when they are concerned with the purity of the group or class. These interventions might

[1] See Foucault (1997), and also Hacking (1982). On statistical and mapping exercises in India, see Cohn (1987), Edney (1997) and Barrow (2003).

draw on discourses which see vile, corrupt or simply foreign bodies as appropriate targets for torture, eugenics or even genocide.[2]

Governmentality, for its part, can continue both sets of interventions. If government can be thought of as 'the conduct of conduct', at least in parts of Europe from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, governmentality can be defined as the means by which we 'think about governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of contexts' (Dean 1999: 209). It involves the internalization of norms, even where those norms (for example, of 'proper' models of sexual, economic or political behaviour) are always contested. If biopolitics involves the extension of sight from the sovereign to 'the state', we might think of governmentalization (including of the state) as involving a further extension of powers to those who profess expertise over the private body or the body public, be they aid workers, economists, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, sexologists or public health workers. These persons also claim the privileges of sight, including those of insight, foresight and even hindsight.

Foucault, of course, wrote rather little about the non-western world.[3] But there is more than a hint of Foucault's arguments in James Scott's account of *Seeing Like a State*. Scott contends that: 'The premodern state was, in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity' (Scott 1998: 2). In contrast, the danger of the high modernist state is that it sees too much. It engages in simplifications that have dangerous if often unintended effects for the citizenry. The high modernist state is distinguished not only by an administrative ordering of nature and society, or by an ideology that evinces a muscle-bound faith in the virtues of reason, progress and industry; it is also defined by its hubristic ability to see a better future for all of 'the people', whether this future consists of collective farms, villagization, the urban visions of Le Corbusier, or socialism itself. It is this weaving together of sight in its temporal and spatial dimensions that announces the high modernist era, and which paves the way for interventions that are 'potentially lethal' (Scott 1998: 5). These interventions are most likely to surface when they

[2] Nikolas Rose (1999: 26) reminds us that Foucault discussed the connections between micro-fascism and macro-fascism in *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1979: 149–50). On biopolitics, archaeological practice and the politics of spatial exclusion, see Nadia Abu El-Haj's (2001) important account of territorial self-fashioning in Israeli society.

[3] We should note, too, and partly as a result, that the question of how well governmentality theory travels has been discussed recently by scholars including Chakrabarty (2000), Kalpagam (2000) and Mehta (1999). The focus of this book is less on the sovereign and disciplinary nature of colonial governmentalities than it is on the different forms of governmentality that are (or can be) embedded in a state that is ostensibly committed to the belated production of development and a more expansive conception of citizenship. We are grateful to Steve Legg for prompting on this point.

are pushed forward by an authoritarian state that is faced by a 'prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist [its] plans' (Scott 1998: 5).[4]

The significance of Scott's work lies in its capacity to link the brutality of the twentieth century to 'certain schemes to improve the human condition that failed'. We will later want to consider Scott's account of intentionality in the light of James Ferguson's more avowedly Foucauldian account of state failures and successes in southern Africa.[5] But Scott is surely right to insist that much of the violence of the twentieth century was a result of utopian visions turning into dystopian realities, and predictably so. The forcible imposition of state simplifications in place of the practical knowledge of urban dwellers and peasants facilitated a dizzying and sometimes terrifying descent into tunnel vision. This was horribly on display at the time of the Great Leap Forward in China. Amartya Sen has shown how this monstrous episode gave rise to a famine which killed more than thirty million people between 1958 and 1961.[6] The famine was caused by an administrative culture that discouraged officials from reporting crises of food production and exchange entitlements. The fact that the state turned a blind eye, in other words, and put blinkers on the news media, proved in this case to be as dangerous as those cases of 'monocularity' where agencies of the state focused with deadly intent on supposed threats to the purity of the nation. The famine in China, together with various unrealizable attempts to tame nature, should then be seen as state-produced disasters that parallel the unspeakable acts of state violence that were fashioned by the Nazis or Pol Pot, or by those Hutu politicians in Rwanda who used discourses of tribalness or ethnic cleansing to encourage the slaughter of Tutsis and to advance their own claims over what Frederick Cooper has called the 'gatekeeper state'.[7]

The scale and continuing occurrence of these tragedies reminds us that very many people experience 'the state' precisely and perhaps lastly as a source of physical violence.[8] Even in India – or perhaps especially in India given stereotypical accounts of pacific Hindustan – it is important to insist on the physical nature of the violence that structures many exchanges between state agencies and 'the people'. Stanley Tambiah and Thomas

[4] We are mindful that a full-blown pursuit of laissez-faire can also generate damaging crises and contradictions. Marx and Engels (1967 [1848]), Polanyi (2001 [1947]) and more recently John Gray (2001) have all made this point. We see no reason, however, to endorse Susan Buck-Morss's extraordinary claim that liberal democracies are as likely to produce social catastrophes as are systems of state socialism (Buck-Morss 2002: chapter 1). Buck-Morss's work on Walter Benjamin and the dialectics of seeing (1989) speaks directly to several of the concerns of this book, but it cannot be helpful to so blithely equate what she calls the 'mass utopias' of the East and the West. See also Lilla (2001).

[5] Ferguson (1990). [6] Sen (1989). [7] Cooper (2002).

[8] Sontag (2003: 60) further reminds us that Pol Pot's murderous regime made many of its victims pose for the camera before they were executed. Stalin also used the camera in this way, as an official eye of the state.

Hansen have reminded us of the continuing role of state-sanctioned physical violence in the production of urban space and politics, whether in New Delhi at the time of the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, or in Mumbai under the Shiv Sena.[9] Paul Brass, too, has repeatedly drawn attention to the use of physical force by India's police forces.[10] Ayesha Jalal, meanwhile, has focused on New Delhi's claims to a monopoly over the means of violence, legitimate or otherwise, in its dealings with its rebellious peripheries in the northwest and northeast. In her view, New Delhi has constructed a form of 'democratic authoritarianism' that has a great deal in common with the 'military-bureaucratic authoritarianism' of Pakistan and Bangladesh, notwithstanding 'the meticulous observance of the ritual of elections in India' (Jalal 1995: 249).[11]

This book will certainly have something to say about state-directed acts of violence against men and women in the Indian countryside. But the violence of the state is not at the heart of our concerns, at least not in the sense of physical violence, or violence that involves legal forms of coercion, such as eviction orders. In part, this is because we have not worked extensively in Kashmir, or Punjab, or along the Narmada river valley, and we cannot hope to write a book about rural India as a whole.[12] But even in those areas of India where the army is in occupation, or where forms of rule owe more to ideas of sovereignty than to governmentality, it is still the case that men and women seek to engage with the state as citizens, or as members of populations with legally defined rights or politically inspired expectations.

In many parts of rural eastern India, as we shall see, the problem is not that the state sees too much, which is Scott's concern, but that it sees too little. In the familiar phrases of development studies, the countryside suffers from 'state failure' or a lack of 'good governance'. And yet even in areas where government offices are badly run down, or where the forest guard has to watch his back when walking his beat (another indication of the fragility of the state), some people will be aware that they have been defined as members of Scheduled Communities. They might also

[9] On Delhi, see Tambiah (1990); see also Selbourne (1977) and Tarlo (2001) on the city under Emergency rule. On Mumbai, see Hansen (2002). More so than Tambiah or Brass, Hansen draws on Lacan to make a broader argument about the constitutive and even pleasurable role of violence in the structuring of everyday life. We return to this argument in chapter 7.

[10] Brass (1997, 2003). See also Varshney (2001).

[11] See also Vanaik (1990). We shall explain later in the book why we take a less dismissive view of the role of elections in India.

[12] Evictions of *adivasi* households to make way for quarries, mines or dams have been extensive in Jharkhand, of course, and are reasonably well documented: see Areeparampil (1992), Corbridge (1993a).

know they can make claims on reserved jobs in government or the public sector. Others will know that they have been labelled as BPLs (households below the poverty line), and that they qualify for employment assistance or subsidized food. And we might presume that rather more people will know that the government (*sarkar*) has some responsibility to provide villages with schools and standpipes, and perhaps even housing under the Indira Awas scheme, or rudimentary health- and child-care facilities. These people, in other words, have begun to imbibe the biopolitical discourses of 'the state' itself, and its attempts to seek legitimacy precisely through its wars on 'poverty' and 'backwardness'.

This is also the terrain of development and its modern form of knowledge, development studies. It is here that we want to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the state works and is seen in parts of rural India. In the rest of this chapter we have three objectives. We want, first, to develop a typology of the ways in which different groups of the rural poor might be said to see or to encounter the developmental state. We learn a great deal about 'the state' by examining its changing protocols for bounding 'the poor', and its plans for seeking their development, protection, empowerment or erasure (see chapter 2). For their part, the poor in India learn to see the state through their meetings with particular government officers, and with regard for those government conventions and policies with which they gain familiarity, and this brings us to our second and third objectives.

When a widow goes to the Block headquarters to collect her pension she makes contact with the state in the form of a lower-level official and by entering a designated building.[13] For example, she might be required to sign a particular piece of paper on an official's desk. But these encounters are rarely conducted as the rulebook says they should be. The widow will often be kept waiting for hours in the sun or the rain, and she might have to call on a relative or fixer (*dalaal* or *pyraveekar*) to get her business moving. Small payments (*baksheesh* or *ghus*) might also have to be made to the accountant and/or his peon, and sometimes the payment she receives will be several rupees short. The widow might expect this, although her expectations will vary from place to place according to the conventions of political society (as we show in chapter 6). The point is that she will have learned to see the state not just through her own eyes, but with regard to wider understandings of government.

Recent work on the anthropology of the everyday state and society in India has begun to question the view that lower-level state personnel share

[13] As she would have done in Bihar in 1999/2000, at the time of our fieldwork. On pensions and the post office system, see the interesting recent article by Farrington et al. (2003).

the 'elite' understandings of government that have been internalized by some well-placed makers of public policy. Our second objective will be to review these debates. We shall rehearse the argument that lower-level state officials hold 'vernacular' understandings of government that find little place for ideas of fairness or generalized morality. We shall also consider more general arguments about the embeddedness of the state in society.

We should also note, however, that the widow we have referred to will sometimes counter vernacular accounts of the state by advancing a more rule-based understanding of her own. She is able to demand her pension, and occasionally to stand her ground, precisely because the state has defined her as a citizen with rights, and because it has given her scraps of paper to prove her entitlement to welfare benefits. It follows that our third objective will be to sketch out the sources of these understandings, and to link them to changing discourses on the civil and human rights of individual subjects. Our emphasis here will be on recent debates in development theory and policy. In particular, we will focus on questions of governance, accountability, corruption, participation and empowerment, all of which we return to in the more empirical parts of the book.

Differently poor, differently sighted

Most people do not see the state as a Weberian aggregate, but this is not to say it doesn't happen. We will have cause in this book to report understandings of the state that come close to this. Among the Musahar communities of north Bihar, for example, where females suffer from especially high rates of social exclusion, and where there is little in the way of the political representation that one finds among Paswans, it is understandable that the state should be defined only in hazy terms and on the basis of a limited number of direct contacts. The state appears to function here as much as an absence as a presence. In certain *adivasi* communities, too, in Ranchi District, Jharkhand, a long history of direct rule through *mankis*, *mundas* and now *mukhiyas* has reinforced an experience of sovereignty that reaches back to Agency rule under the British and which is carried forward under the Scheduled Areas legislation.

For the most part, however, the different experiences of different groups of poor people with different state agencies should caution us against a reductionist understanding of 'state–poor' encounters. The recent emphasis upon social exclusion in the expert literatures on poverty is one sign of this diversity, even as these new discourses themselves define

new populations of the poor. The same would be true of participatory poverty assessments. As we shall see in chapter 2, the Government of India has distinguished itself by its insistent attention to the variegated nature of poverty in South Asia. The extraordinary range of its anti-poverty programmes is testimony to this, including as it does area-based interventions, employment guarantee schemes, compensatory discrimination, resettlement programmes, provisions for women and children, and group-based participation schemes. And then there are its more general programmes of educational and health-care provision, and the enactment of laws to protect people against encroachments on common property resources, say, or the underpayment of wages.

The production of these multiple sites of state–poor encounters, or of poverty itself, is something that will concern us greatly in the chapters that follow. It is not our purpose to lump together experiences that properly should be kept apart. Nevertheless, it will help our later accounts if we first deepen our understandings of what we mean by an encounter with ‘the state’. What are the stages for these encounters, and what should we look for in the performance of these exchanges? There are several ways to approach these questions and it is mainly for reasons of exposition that we have chosen to deal with them under the separate and rather mundane headings of ‘when, why and who?’ and ‘where and how?’ Clearly, these fields are interwoven, as our empirical materials will later confirm.

When, why and who?

As soon as we begin to think about the ‘when and whys’ of poorer people’s encounters with the state, we run into problems. These encounters will vary to a significant degree from place to place, and over time. They also depend crucially on which agency, or ‘who’, in the state is being seen. In the remote interior villages of Singhbhum District, Bihar (now Jharkhand), it was common in the late-1970s for a forest-dependent villager to see the state mainly in the person of a forest guard, or a *panchayat sewak*, and perhaps also in the shape of occasional meetings called by the *Mukhiya* (the elected head of the local *panchayat*). (The position of village leaders, fixers and local politicians is something we pick up in part II.) In Tamil Nadu in the 1980s a marginal farming family with children might have been familiar with village extension workers, and perhaps with local revenue officials, the Junior Engineer, and the person(s) responsible for administering the Noon Day Meal Scheme. In Gujarat, meanwhile, the gangs of migrant field labourers that Jan Breman has written about so movingly might have been most familiar with local policemen

and the government labour officer.[14] Next door, in Maharashtra, significant numbers of women might have formed an impression of the state through their encounters with the Employment Guarantee Scheme.[15]

Given that one of the major arguments of this book concerns the importance of specifics, we might reasonably doubt the value of making general arguments across the breadth of India. But this needn't stop us thinking more purposefully about the 'whens and whys and whos' of state–poor interactions. For example, we can think in terms of typologies of the state and political society, on the one hand, and what we might call the generic basis of some of these exchanges, on the other. By typologies of the state, we have in mind charts or tables that would aim to show the strength and functions of the official state at different spatial scales. We will provide such charts in part II when we look at the organization of the official state in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, and we will try to embed this information within a broader account of the agencies functioning in the surrounding political society (including the CPI-M in West Bengal and components of the shadow state). In terms of the generic basis of the 'whens and whys and whos' of state–poor exchanges, we can make a first cut at the issue by considering exchanges bound up with entitlements and economic flows (both more and less direct), and those bound up with flows of information and people (again, more and less direct).

Entitlements and economic flows Consider, first, what we might call the material or 'economic' bases of state–poor relations. In a very real sense, a poorer person sees the state most directly when he or she registers a birth or death, receives a registration certificate, picks up a pension or some other entitlement, takes a child to school (perhaps), receives or does not receive electricity or clean water, is interrogated by a police officer, and so on. Not all of these exchanges will take place on a daily basis. To the extent that they are regularized, they can also be weekly, monthly or seasonal. Some might be annual or even decadal (the Census). Very often, too, they will be bunched and/or episodic (as we explain below, when we consider the case of a tribal villager in Jharkhand dealing with the local Forest Department). Such exchanges are also received and understood in very different ways. Johnny Parry reports that unionized male workers in the steel plant at Bhilai (now in Chhattisgarh) very often see the government in positive terms. What with reasonable

[14] Breman (1985a, 1985b).

[15] Another way of putting this is to say that different states have become identified with different types of anti-poverty programmes – employment creation in Maharashtra, for example, nutrition in Tamil Nadu, education in Kerala, health issues in Rajasthan, and so on.

monthly wages, dearness allowances, bonuses, sick pay and paid holidays, it is perhaps not surprising that some members of this (admittedly urban) labour aristocracy like to announce that 'there is no mother or father' like their public sector employer.[16] We might suppose, too, that a woman who receives her pension in full on the appointed day will form a different view of the state than a woman denied these rights or courtesies. By the same token, some people will form a jaundiced view of the state precisely because members of a neighbouring family – and not their own kith or kin – benefit from a system of reserved employment in the public sector.

More importantly, perhaps, calculations about the economics of state–poor exchanges take place across a number of interlocking spheres. Some are less immediate than others, and some depend on very different forms of sight (from eye-to-eye contact, through newspapers, possibly even from the Internet), which might be mediated by the comments of others or by individual and/or collective memories. This much is evident as soon as we consider matters relating to taxation or prices. It is a well-established proposition of historical sociology that modern states emerge from the need to make war, and that the legitimacy of those states depends on their need to raise funds by taxation.[17] Where rule is linked to revenues in this way it will be linked to a broadening of the polity. No taxation without representation, as the old saw has it. Direct taxation, in particular, encourages a measure of scrutiny of the state by its citizens. The fact that the bulk of direct taxes will be paid by better-off men and women also lays the ground for discourses which urge the rolling back of the state, or which complain about the 'excessive subsidization' of some households by others who have 'earned' their incomes through hard work or risk-taking. These discourses become the stuff of politics. They form the terrain for battles over the meaning and purpose of government and its responsibilities to its citizens. In a crude sense, too, they highlight the tensions that exist between biopolitics (and the impulse to improve a population as a whole) and neoliberal forms of governmentality (with their injunctions in favour of prudence and self-reliance).

Another example concerns the terms of trade between agriculture and industry, or the city and the countryside. Marxists insist that farmers and

[16] Parry (1996).

[17] Tilly (1975, 1985); see also Levi (1988) and Bobbitt (2002). In many parts of the world, however, as in oil-rich states like Venezuela or Nigeria, the flow of funds between the state and its population bears scant resemblance to this 'west European' model of government (Coronil 1997, Watts 2003). This is in large part because colonial or neocolonial forms of rule made 'Europeanization' difficult if not impossible, at least in the terms since demanded by modernization theorists. See also Apter (1999) and Piot (1999).

labourers have very different class interests, as in key respects they do. But there is also evidence to suggest that labourers across India have been successfully mobilized by richer farmers in support of the 'new agrarian politics'.[18] This politics aims to pit an authentic rural India, or *Bharat*, against a loose coalition of merchants, city dwellers and their government supporters. An urban-dominated state then comes to be seen as 'a vampire that drinks the blood' of the countryside, and which enforces price-twists that damage the interests of rural producers and consumers alike. The fact that that this depiction of the inter-sectoral terms of trade might be inaccurate – recent evidence suggests that the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) has been successful in lifting the procurement prices of grains above the market rate, and Jan Mooij has demonstrated that many poor people do benefit from cheaper food through the system of Fair Price Shops – is not the issue.[19] Men and women will come to see the state not simply through the prices they are charged, but through the constructions of fairness that are imposed upon them in contending political discourses.

Sighting is never simple or straightforward, even for people blessed with 20:20 vision. Tom Stoppard made this point very clearly in his play, *Jumpers*, where he had one of his characters enquire about how the sun looked after the Copernican revolution. Did people still see it the same? Did they still see it orbiting the earth? The answers, of course, were yes and no, in that order. It did still look round and yellow, but it now seemed more like a fix point around which the earth moved in orbit.[20]

The state in India can also take on this before and after appearance, including in the realm of financial transfers. And this is not simply because people see the state through the observations of others (politicians, media people, NGOs, kith and kin), although these mediations are vitally important. Sight is also learned and based on past experiences, and many state–poor financial transactions do not follow the rulebook. Too many studies of the geography of public spending in India fail to acknowledge the

[18] See, *inter alia*, Bentall and Corbridge (1996), Brass (1995), Corbridge (1997), Dhanagare (1983), Hasan (1998), Lindberg (1995) and Nadkarni (1987).

[19] See Varshney (1995) on the CACP. Mooij's (1999) account of the Public Distribution System also makes the point that men and women see the state, in the form of the operations of Fair Price Shops, very differently in Karnataka (where the PDS is subject to a good deal of corruption and elite capture) and Kerala (where accountability mechanisms are more securely in place in civil and political society).

[20] More precisely, and more elegantly: George (*facing away, out front, emotionless*); 'Meeting a friend in a corridor, Wittgenstein said: "Tell me, why do people always say it was *natural* for men to assume that the sun went round the earth rather that the earth was rotating?" His friend said, "Well, obviously, because it just *looks* as if the sun is going round the earth." To which the philosopher replied, "Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if the earth was rotating?"' (Stoppard 1972: 75; emphases in the original).

reverse financial transfers that send monies or goods from poorer people to politicians and government servants. Corbridge and Kumar have reported the case of Polus B—, an *adivasi* smallholder and teacher in Ranchi District, Jharkhand, who in the 1990s sought permission to cut down ten jackfruit trees on his homestead land.[21] Polus B— wanted to sell the trees to finance a small enterprise he had in mind, and he was legally entitled to harvest the trees once he had gained the permission of the Revenue Circle Officer and the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO). But therein lay the problem. Although the value of Polus's trees was 80,000 rupees, net of logging and transportation costs, he ended up selling them to a *dalaal* for just Rs. 20,000. Polus B— knew full well that it would cost him an awful lot of time and money to get the permissions he required. Some of his friends had made thirty trips to Ranchi to gain one audience with a DFO. He might also be faced with illegal demands for money at police checkposts on the road leading from his village to the timber depots in Ranchi. Better to let the *dalaal* take the risk and bear the expense.

Corbridge and Kumar reckoned that the *dalaal*'s final share of the trade was of the order of Rs. 26,000. The remaining Rs. 34,000 disappeared into the pockets of officials in the forestry, revenue and police services (see table 1.1). Some of that money would later make its way to politicians. Politicians have to be able to fund their campaigns, and government officers in Bihar and Jharkhand need to secure their next postings. We comment further on these secondary transfers in part II. Our point here is that we should expect poorer people in rural India to form their accounts of the state with regard to some complicated and crosscutting geographies of financial exchange. These geographies must then become the objects of ethnography in a very exact fashion. We learn about 'the state' – about its different boundaries, about its workings, about perceptions of 'it' – precisely through case studies.

Information and people This will also be the case when we come to non-financial exchanges. Although our typology of state–poor exchanges cannot hope to be exhaustive, it should be clear that these exchanges include flows of information and people. In each case the flows will be in both directions. In the case of information, agencies of the state engage in regular exercises to extract information from and about its 'populations'. The capacity of the state is defined by these exercises. Gerard O'Tuathail reminds us of the fate of one of the first English mapmakers of Tyrone

[21] Corbridge and Kumar (2002).

Table 1.1 *Rent-seeking in the tree trade*

Local Sarkar 1	Revenue Dept. (Circle Office) 2	Forest Dept. Territorial wing (Range Office) 3	Forest Dept. Territorial wing (Superior Office) 4	Police Dept. (Police Station) 5	Other expenses 6
Mukhiya (a)	Clerk (Rs.1,000)	Range Forest Officer (4,000) (b)	Clerks (4,500)	Officer in Charge (2,000)	Miscellaneous payments (1,500)
	Admin (1,000)	Clerk (500)	Officers (5,000)	Check posts (500)	Daily expense and transport for himself @ 150 × 40 trips (6,000)
	C.I. (1,000)	B.O. (1,000)	Others (500)		Transport for verification officers @ 350 × 3 trips (1,050)
	Circle Officer (2,000)	Forest Guard (1,000)			Contingency/ *chai-pani* (1,000)
		Check Posts (500)			Logging and Transport (20,000)

Summary: Estimated Net Receipt from the State Trading Office: Rs. 100,000; Expected Total Expenses: Rs. 54,050; Payment to Owner: Rs. 20,000; Expected Profits for *Dalaal*: Rs. 25,950 or Rs. 650 per day of labour.
Note: the data here are based on the Polus B— case, but the model should not be construed as a direct representation of that encounter; rather, it should be seen as a generic model. This version of the model assumes that the *dalaal* will log the tree himself and deliver the timber to the FD depot. The costs would be different were he to employ the FD to do the logging.
(a) This payment will often be in the form of a political donation or other favour.
(b) The Range Officer might use some of this money to procure genuine administrative facilities which are not provided by the bureaucracy because of a lack of funds.
Source: Corbridge and Kumar (2002: 778).

District in the northern reaches of Ireland: he was attacked and had his head cut off. The 'people' refused to be mapped, at least until they had been beaten into submission.[22] Similar acts of refusal have been recorded in India, and in the United States in 2000 the rate of nil returns to the Census mapped out a veritable geography of resistance to the state that peaked in the black inner cities and in various fastnesses of the west and southwest. People were more likely to make themselves known to the Census takers in middle-class suburbs and in the 'Germanic' states of the north, including Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The Census remains one of the principal conduits of biopolitics in rural areas of India. Men and women experience it very differently, even so, in different parts of the country. In many cases, women do not experience the Census at all, at least not directly. Whether the schedules are administered by local officials, elected representatives or schoolteachers, the identified 'head of household' is almost always male. Women experience the state through the stories of their husbands or male relatives. The state's preference for dealing with poorer people on the basis of defined households leads to similar maps of inclusion and exclusion when the flows of information are circular. As we report in chapters 3 and 4, some women in our field sites were in possession of cards that confirmed their eligibility for work under the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS). Others had certificates confirming their status as members of the Scheduled Castes or Tribes. These cards or certificates, however, are usually made available by the state only after it has first collected information from 'the household unit'. EAS cards, for example, are supposed to be allocated to members of 'registered labouring households', and it is households that are defined as Below Poverty Line (BPL) on the basis of periodic forays into the countryside by government officers.[23]

On other occasions the flow of information will be from 'the state' to 'the population', but here too we need to be alert to the modalities of the exchange. We also need to pay attention to the way that information is received, translated and understood. John Reid's *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Ranchi, 1902–1910*, published by the colonial state in 1912, noted in passing that 'forest offences' were to be policed according to an edict which proclaimed that 'sakhua [sal, or *shorea robusta*] trees could not be felled if they were of a girth of twenty-seven inches or more at a height three feet from the ground' (Government of Bihar and Orissa 1912: 129). This information was duly

[22] O'Tuathail (1996: 1).
[23] The military or expeditionary metaphor is overstated, of course, but not without resonance: see Driver (2000) for an interesting discussion of this sort of 'geography militant'.

gazetted, in English. Even where the information was passed to local Mundas or Mankis in Hindi, Mundari or Nagpuri, one might doubt that a reference to twenty-seven inches meant a great deal. Villagers and forest guards would need to translate this command into local conceptions of girth, and in the process a space might open up for misunderstandings or police actions. (Recorded forest offences in the Chaibasa and Kolhan reserves, a little further south, peaked significantly in the years 1912/13 to 1915/16.)[24]

The edict on *sakhua* fellings is an example of an indirect flow of information from the state to the population. Most of the villagers who needed to know the new rule would probably never be aware of it. The state made no effort to contact households or individuals directly. Matters are clearly very different when the state provides information on crop prices to farmers across the airwaves, or when it posts bills outside the Block Development Office, or in villages or *tolas* (hamlets). The experiences that men and women form of the state will be significantly different in each of these instances, but in each case the medium of exchange allows for a more direct sighting (or 'sounding') of the state. In those parts of rural India where even poorer families now have access to TV sets, perhaps powered by a car battery where there is no electricity supply, the possibility also exists for what Rajagopal has called, in the context of the screenings of the Ramayan by Doordarshan that began in 1987, a collective libidinal experience.[25] This mode of experiencing the state reaches back to conversations that people might have on the basis of shared readings of a newspaper. Whether it also anticipates those sightings of the state that might be provided by Internet access – along the lines perhaps of the *panchayat*-level computer booths that have been promised in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh – is a moot point. Much will depend on who accesses the booths, and how they share their experiences. If members of the rural poor do gain access to computer booths, will they mainly be younger males? And what consequences might this have for information retrieval, circulation and even use?

It is likely that the Internet will change poorer people's experiences of and reactions to the state, just as new technologies have done previously. Chapter 7 will discuss the accountability campaigns waged by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan (MKSS) in Rajasthan, where social activists have put pressure on local government officials to place more of their budgetary information in the public domain. If villagers can see how 'their' (the public's) money is being spent, and on what, they can more easily challenge 'unfair' patterns of government funding. To this

[24] Corbridge (1993a: 141). [25] Rajagopal (1994: 1662).

end the MKSS has committed considerable resources to the purchase of photocopiers. Photocopying allows for a sighting of the state that is continuous and more or less permanent. The retrieval of information about the state does not depend on impromptu conversations, or the memories of one or two individuals who have coaxed information from government officials. Memory is provided as paper copy and provides the basis, in this case, for challenges to the state that make use of the state's own data. The Internet, in principle, should allow for more of the same, particularly where Internet access is connected to a printer. It should also allow for more immediate responses to the state. These responses might take the form of complaints under a citizen's charter. They might also extend to alternative websites that seek to name and shame allegedly corrupt public servants.

Here, of course, we rub shoulders with the populist rhetoric of some politicians and activists. Notwithstanding the potential for empowerment that the Internet might one day offer, it is important to insist that Internet access in India will remain uneven for years to come, and that Internet usage is rarely the unmediated activity that some of its proponents believe it to be. People's use of the Internet will continue to be shaped by the information they receive from other sources. If we want to understand what is happening in rural India we will need to couple an understanding of information flows to an understanding of flows of people.

This is true in at least three respects. Strong states are defined by their ability to set and police their boundaries. Citizens see the state through a system of passports and visas, and with regard to the state officials that monitor their movements. It might be thought that these geographies are at some remove from the life-worlds of poorer men and women in rural India, and very often this will be the case. In one of our field sites, however, in Old Malda district, West Bengal, which is close to the border with Bangladesh, the Border Security Force looms large in local imaginaries of the state. We can presume, too, that the state's ability to command movement would have impressed itself on those thousands of men and women from Chota Nagpur who were shipped to the tea-gardens of Assam at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The mass of the population also experiences the state at 'home'. To put it another way, the citizenry sees the state not just in terms of flows of power, money, commodities or information, but also in terms of the circulation into their domains of the men and women who represent (or who can be made to represent) the state. When we talk about seeing the state we need to press closely on whether and how certain individuals are considered to be state employees (teachers, for example). We also need to have regard for the career tracks of government servants. Some will be peripatetic and highly trained, like Indian Administrative Service

officers. Others will not be. Assistant engineers or accountants in a Block Development Office in Bihar might remain there for many years. Most of them will have learned their jobs by shadowing others or simply by 'doing it'.[26] Local people can be expected to form their accounts of the state with regard to their encounters with these and other differently placed public officials.

They will also see the state, finally, through the movements and activities of local fixers and political leaders. We shall have more to say on this later on. For the moment we should note that more and more of these leaders will be women and members of the Backward and Scheduled Caste populations. Legislation to ensure the reservation of seats in the various tiers of India's polity is working to promote a different composition of the 'political state'. Poorer men and women can expect to have exchanges with politicians and government servants from more diverse social backgrounds. How these exchanges are staged, however, can matter as much as the exchanges themselves, and can tell us a great deal about people's perceptions of the state (both as 'outsiders' and 'insiders').

How and where?

The performativity of government business and politics is not a secondary matter when it comes to considering how people see the state. Consider the provisions attached to the receipt of 'workfare' benefits in some jurisdictions in California. Women seeking benefits in Riverside are required to turn up to interviews with service providers not just at the appointed time, but according to an approved code of dress and presentation of the self. According to Jamie Peck's description, the woman must not wear excessive make-up. Her hair must be tied behind her head. Her fingernails must be clean. She must not wear a short skirt or spandex pants, or jeans, shorts or tennis shoes. She must not chew gum. And she must agree in principle to take a urine test for signs of 'drug use' (Peck 2001: 176).

Peck doesn't tell us whether the supervisor is also required to dress in a particular fashion, be it lounge suit, smart-casual or uniform. But his basic point is well made: the local state in Riverside is using its command over money to exert fierce control over the body corporeal. Of course, not all exchanges between states and poorer people will follow this model.

[26] Karen Coelho also refers to engineers in Chennai's 'Metrowater' who learn the job 'on the ground' (2004: 6). We came across this excellent paper as we were preparing the final version of our book. We are grateful to Lalli Metsola for drawing it to our attention. See also chapter 5 for further discussion.

There will be times when the state is meant to respond to the instructions of a beneficiary population.[27] We see this very clearly in part II when we come to a discussion of the Employment Assurance Scheme in eastern India. EAS legislation is written in such a way that members of registered labouring households are able to demand employment from local government officials. Village-level meetings should also be held to select the agents who will execute approved projects. The state is then to be informed of the decision.

The point we wish to make here, however, is a slightly broader one about the staging of state–poor encounters. Dress codes can matter. The wording of exchanges certainly matters. Who gets to speak when and in what tones? It might also matter where the business of state is staged. Is it always in a government office, as we might expect it to be in those countries that have developed 'scientific' forms of government? How might people see the state if the distinction between 'home and work' is blurred? How, too, might officers of the state see their own buildings, in terms, for example, of the circulation of files, or the reproduction and government of hierarchical relations between staff members? And how might these sightings affect the way that government business is carried out?

We will deal with some of these questions in chapters 3–6. As we said before, the devil is in the detail. But one way to sharpen the narrative is to think about something as humdrum as the queue, or what Americans call waiting in line. More even than the question of dress and self-presentation, the causes and significance of queueing (and queue-jumping) are hugely neglected in the social science literature, and yet they have a great deal to tell us about how social encounters are structured.[28] Consider, for example, how men might wait their turn to jump into the barber's chair in London or New Delhi on a Saturday morning. On such occasions, queues express not only the scarcity of a resource (in this case, of barbers to customers), but also an ideology of equality, albeit one that is mediated by a shared capacity to buy a common good in the

[27] There is some evidence, too, that government agencies and officials have increasingly to respond to complaints from 'the public', especially in urban areas (including urban 'slums') where there are now well-defined expectations that water and electricity, for example, should be provided by 'the state'. The fact that these expectations are often frustrated – not least because of plans to charge 'customers' for privately provided services – leads to intense struggles in political society and around the meanings and sightings of 'the state'. At the same time, a culture of complaint points in the direction of the more active 'citizens' that government reformers have been calling for. More research is needed on the making of complaints by different individuals and social groups, and on the ways these complaints are handled (accepted, avoided, resisted, deflected) by 'public servants'. Coelho (2004) provides important pointers. See also chapters 5 and 7.

[28] For a preliminary discussion, see Corbridge (2004).

private sector.[29] If someone mistakes his turn in the queue by one place, he will be let off with a humorous rebuke. But if someone tries to jump the queue openly, and by two or more places, he would most likely be asked 'who do you think you are?' His behaviour would have breached a form of governmentality (the self-regulation of conduct) that marks out all customers as equals.

In many other settings civility will go out of the window, and not just in New Delhi. Take a trip to any railway station in London during rush-hour and you will see middle-aged Englishmen barging women and more elderly people out of their way to secure a seat that they know instinctively they are 'not in line for'. But if claims about English civility need to be taken with a pinch of salt, it might still be argued that the English have a respect for queues that is not often to be found it Italy, say, or Miami, and which is rarely to be seen when men and women from poorer communities try to 'meet the state' in eastern India. A sense that might is right is far more common, and is regularly on show in and around state buildings in rural eastern India. We learn a lot about the state, about how it works and is seen by different people, by attending to the patterns of spatial–temporal behaviour that men and women engage in to make contact with *sarkar*, and to conduct their business with it. How many times does a person have to turn up at the Block Development Office to see the BDO or a Junior Engineer? How long does he or she have to wait on any given occasion? How often do they observe others getting ahead of them? How do they respond to this? How are they treated when they meet an official of the state? How are they addressed? How is their use of time acknowledged or respected? Which rooms are they allowed in? Are they allowed in as 'citizens', or must contacts be forged by a broker? Are they seen as a nuisance or member of a 'troublesome' social group? How do officials deal with one another, or with the brokers and politicians who might exert pressures upon them?

These are some of the questions that need to be asked when we talk about seeing the state. They can be added to questions we raised earlier about dress, language and the presentation of the self, all of which are highly gendered. But there is also the matter of the geography of the state 'itself' (as opposed to patterns of access to it). Later in this book we will comment on the layout and repair of government buildings, and on the passing of files between government servants. If we want to engage debates about the capacity of the state, or state failure, it helps to have in

[29] Marx once described money as a great cynic and leveller, and what we observe here is an effect of the equality that money in one sense confers.

mind a sense of the physicality of the state and its resources. But there is a prior question here as well. Just where does the state begin and end? How should we think about the state–society distinction where a significant amount of state business is transacted on the verandah of a government officer's private residence? More to the point, how do different groups of people in rural India make sense of these entangled geographies? Raising these questions brings us face to face with a growing literature on the anthropology of the everyday state and society in India, and with questions about how 'the state' is seen by those who are in its employ. It also raises questions about the territoriality of the state and the politics of scarcity.

State and society: embeddedness, scarcity and territoriality

In some parts of Africa we might want to make sense of a raucous geography of queuing in terms of a model of the absolute scarcity of the state. In his controversial account of states and power in Africa, Jeffrey Herbst argues that the failure of many regimes in the region is to be found in that peculiar combination of circumstances which brought localized polities to power at a time when the international community insisted on dealing only with 'nation-states'.[30] The leaders of these polities were able to use foreign aid to strengthen their control over the focal points of their newly independent countries, but they were sometimes unable to extend their control of territory much beyond the capital city and its environs. The low population densities of rural Africa also conspired against the efforts of some regimes to impose a monopoly over the legitimate use of force within a given parcel of territory.

In India, however, notwithstanding prolonged military incursions in the northeast and Kashmir, what might be called the scarcity of the state is best understood in relative terms. Although we shall meet severe cases of state depletion in parts of Bhojpur District, Bihar (a Naxalite heartland), or in Malda District, West Bengal, for the most part the developmental state is well entrenched and is underpinned by the All-India Services and by the far greater number of men and women working for their state equivalents (the Bihar Administrative Service, for example). In part this reflects the legacy of European colonialism in India, but it also reflects the considerable efforts at nation-building by Sardar Patel at the time of Independence and by Nehru in the 1950s. India was made to hang together.[31]

[30] Herbst (2000). [31] Corbridge and Harriss (2000: chapter 3).

The relative scarcity of the state in India has generally been approached in terms of large-scale models of the contradictions of India's political economy. In the work both of Pranab Bardhan, and Lloyd and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, the state in India is said to have been captured by various demand groups, including organized labour, well-paid bureaucrats, and bullock capitalists/richer farmers.[32] It is then unable to prosecute the politics of command that has characterized the developmental states of Southeast and East Asia. At its best, the state in India comes to be defined by those far-reaching mammaries of welfarism that have been satirized by novelists like Upamanyu Chatterjee and Siddhartha Deb.[33] The state confers the blessings of consumption upon those who are able to access and milk it. At its worst, the state simply fails to work. Unable to raise taxes from those who should be required to pay them, elements within the federal state turn instead to deficit financing or fail to pay several thousands of people who are in their employ. By mid-2003, many employees of the State Road Transport Corporation in Bihar had received less than fifteen days' salary since 1994. Small wonder, then, that state officials fail to show up for work, or make their incomes by selling their services to those who can pay. The privatization of the state has probably gone further in Bihar than in any state in India, but not for the reasons announced by economics textbooks. People are bypassing the state because it is unable to deliver the supplies of water, electricity or security that they need, and many officials are making their incomes by providing these services by other means. The absent teacher who provides private tuition is one case in point. The looting of the state's supplies of medicines is another. As Krishna Ananth reports, 'Medicine packs bearing marks indicating that they are supplies to the Health Department are available for sale with chemists in Patna and elsewhere in Bihar' (Ananth 2003: 13).

Examples such as these can be multiplied across India, and point us towards a body of literature that is consistent with the models of political economy but which is more directly concerned with sightings of the state by government officials themselves. This tradition of writing reaches back at least as far as F. G. Bailey's work on the local state in Orissa. On the basis of prolonged fieldwork in the Kondmals, Bailey was able to identify the roles played by richer peasants and village faction leaders in bridging the worlds of the state and the locality. Although most villagers preferred to keep the state at a distance, there was by the 1950s a general appreciation that this was not always possible, and that the village should make efforts to draw down state funds for a local school or post office. Perhaps more

[32] Bardhan (1984); Rudolph and Rudolph (1987).
[33] Chatterjee (2003); Deb (2003).

pertinently, however, Bailey observed that, 'the link between Bisipara [his research village] and the Administration is the single thread of *imperium*. No-one in Bisipara is mother's brother to the Deputy Commissioner. The social roles of the administrators and the men of the village do not overlap. Even caste is irrelevant' (Bailey 1957: 248). He continues:

> The division persists inside the Administration, as one would expect, since the Administration is an organization and not a community. Those who are recruited locally as policemen or messengers remain members of their village communities and retain the outlook of a villager. Their attitude to the government (*Sircar*) is fundamentally the same as that of the ordinary cultivator. Their loyalty remains with the village, and this applies even to the headmen . . . There is, in fact, a parody of the four castes of Hinduism. In this parody there is the Gazetted Officer caste, the Non-Gazetted Officer caste, the *Babu* (clerk) caste, and the rest, comprising the menials in the Administration and the villagers. In the Kondmals they do not inter-dine and they do not intermarry, and it is very hard to get from one class to the next above. There is only one [local-born] Gazetted Officer and [he, a university graduate] is something of an outsider, since his grandfather, a Christian, came to the Kondmals in the service of the Administration. (Bailey 1957: 248–9; emphases in the original)

Although Bailey plays down the importance of caste, it is clear that his account of the relative scarcity of the state has much in common with a more recent literature on state–society interactions. This is so both in terms of the territoriality of the state and what Benedict Anderson has called a sense of the 'imagined community'.[34] One of the great conceits of government is the suggestion that the writ of London or New Delhi or Islamabad reaches without interruption from the commanding heights of the state through the agency's central offices and dispersed field offices to the trenches that are at the bottom of the state hierarchy.[35] But this will only rarely be the case. Far more often, the men and women who populate state agencies are mindful not only of the rulebook and their supervisors, but also of their need to live and work with their peers and with those they are meant to serve, as well as with their representatives. The forest guard to whom we alluded earlier might well be charged with responsibilities for forest management, and might indeed have coercive powers that he (or more occasionally she) can bring to bear on villagers. But the beat officer also has to live locally, and to this end he needs to develop the skills of a street-level bureaucrat. Failure to do so, as Vasan explains, can result in any number of difficulties, from problems in finding food or accommodation to the risk of attack in the depths of a forest.[36] The forest guard thus comes to see the state as a complex organization

[34] Anderson (1983). [35] The phrasing here is after Migdal (2001: 118–21).
[36] Vasan (2002). See also Lipsky (1980) on street-level bureaucrats.

buffeted by contending social forces. This sighting conditions the way that he deals with his charges, and with how they in turn come to see the state.

The relative scarcity of the state, however, is not simply a matter of local resistance to its attempts to put down roots that are independent of political society. According to Sudipta Kaviraj and Partha Chatterjee, the workings of the local state must also be understood in terms of a model of embeddedness that highlights a sharp disjuncture between elite and vernacular understandings of the state-idea. Their analysis takes on a Marxian hue that we don't find in Bailey, drawing as it does on Gramsci's ideas about 'passive revolution'. Kaviraj and Chatterjee maintain that the weakness of the bourgeoisie in India at Independence was sufficiently profound that it had to seek the capitalist transformation of the country with the help of a rising rich peasantry and a supposedly progressive state. The vehicle for this model of structural transformation was the Planning Commission, and the idea was circulated that citizens should 'Place [their] prayers at the feet of the *sarkar*, the omnipotent and supremely enlightened state, [where they would] be duly passed on to the body of experts who [were] planning for the overall progress of the country' (Chatterjee 1986: 160).

The problem was that most ordinary Indians refused to play the game. Not only was their experience of government very different – *sarkar* being resented where it was not seen as a source of immediate funds or as a site for venality or of the absurd – but they had few expectations that it *should* behave in this 'modern' fashion. Kaviraj maintains that the upper echelon of the state-bureaucratic agency was infused with a colonial mentality that separated it from the life-worlds of the social majorities and the state's own lower-level officials. The failure of the state to secure its stated outcomes was not simply a matter of resource scarcities, at least in a pecuniary sense; it also reflected the fact that the state 'had feet of vernacular clay' (Kaviraj 1984: 227). The English-speaking elites who formed the shock troops of the Nehruvian and post-Nehruvian states found their mandates being 'reinterpreted beyond recognition' by the ordinary Indians who worked 'very low down in the bureaucracy' (Kaviraj 1991: 91). A large number of these men and women, Kaviraj suggests, would no more have thought outside the cellular structures of Indian social life – a life structured by family, kin, caste and community – than they would have conceived of their bosses as superiors only in terms of their position in a graduating batch or the government Gazette. As Satish Saberwal further observes, state institutions such as the courts and bureaucracies have not had the 'normative support necessary for their reliable, effective functioning' because their western logic 'does not command much of either

understanding or respect on the ground' (Saberwal 1996: 150; quoted and discussed in Fuller and Harriss 2001: 9).

To the extent that the life-worlds of the superior and the subaltern *do* depart in this manner it is vital that research pays close attention to the language and staging of state–society interactions. The relative scarcity of the state might have as much to do with (mis)understandings as with the distribution of resources, even allowing that the two spheres will be closely linked. But there is a further sense in which the seemingly unequal and sometimes humiliating encounters between citizens and state officials, or between officers within the state, are shaped by the production of 'scarcity', and this has to do with politics. F. G. Bailey recognized this, of course. His work is closely attentive to the ways in which members of the Congress Party articulated the exchanges that bound the Kondmals of western Orissa to a 'state' – and did so in a manner that did justice to each side's needs and expectations. But it is only in the more explicitly pluralist work of Myron Weiner, or of later writers like the Rudolphs (or, indeed, Chatterjee and Kaviraj), that one finds an account of the politics of scarcity that is sensitive to the effects on the state of the mobilization of ascriptive identities.[37] Perhaps the signal virtue of this body of work is that it links the study of political economy to that of identity politics. Weiner's work also triggered a greater realization that the bottlenecks that produced so much uncivil behaviour in or around government offices was the result of scarcities produced by an inefficient economy and an overdeveloped polity. The weakness of the private sector in India propelled the country's new citizens towards *sarkar* for all manner of benefits and safeguards that the state could not meet in full or even in large part, and which perhaps no state could ever meet. Politics then degenerated into a form of competitive populism that pushed voters to seek the support of those politicians who could best deliver the resources which the state was meant to disburse objectively and without partiality. What Bailey later called 'the civility of indifference' gave way to forms of behaviour characterized by rudeness, shoving and a heightened sensitivity to group differences.[38]

Weiner's argument has recently been extended by Kanchan Chandra, and with considerable ethnographic acuity. In contradistinction to Bailey's earlier argument about the irrelevance of caste, Chandra's work in Uttar Pradesh shows how the mobilization of horizontal 'ethnic' groupings like the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or the Scheduled Castes has been the most important vehicle for the capture and reworking of the

[37] Weiner (1962); Rudolph and Rudolph (1967).
[38] See Bailey (1996); see also Weiner and Katzenstein (1981).

state at Block, District and even State levels.[39] The extension of quotas to the OBCs in the 1990s has given further impetus to the development of a 'patronage democracy' in which access to state resources is fiercely controlled by ruling-group politicians acting in a discretionary manner. The difference now is that numbers are counting, and the Forward Castes in north India are losing out, or are required to make new alliances. In Mayawati's Uttar Pradesh, or in Laloo Yadav's Bihar, this argument further suggests, more and more citizens are forced to pay homage to their MPs or MLAs, or indeed to the highest-ranking politicians in the state, if they want to secure even the most meagre benefit.

The perversity of these arrangements can be so great that Laloo Yadav might seek to run down the system of public health-care in Bihar in order that he or his acolytes can provide scarce hospital beds for their supporters. In neighbouring Uttar Pradesh the chief minister can insist that village leaders approach her (or him) directly if they want a new hand-pump to be constructed. The queueing behaviour that we began to sketch out earlier is then produced by this deepening politics of scarcity, and not simply as result of cultural understandings about hierarchy or equality. Just as importantly, the pressures upon politicians to contest elections on a regular basis are so strong that pressures are in turn brought to bear on state officials from the trenches all the way up to the commanding heights of the Secretariat. The power of politicians to transfer government officers is just one indication of the three-sided relationships that hold between elected representatives, citizens and public officials. If we are to understand how the state works, and how it presents itself to various groups within the rural poor, we need to understand that the rulebook and the training academies at Dehra Dun are just one source of its self-understandings.[40] If the argument of this section is right, sightings of and within the state take shape within regimes of relative scarcity that are produced in three dimensions: by the uncertainties of understanding and translation that structure exchanges between elite and vernacular groups; by the inefficiencies of India's public sector (with its tendencies both to rent-seeking behaviour and real capacity constraints: see chapter 5); and by the pressures that are brought to bear on government officials by 'ethnic' and other interest groups and their political representatives and antagonists.

[39] Chandra (2004). At the time of writing this book was unavailable to us, but we believe that we are correctly summarizing one of its major arguments.

[40] Albeit, these are powerful sources for the self-understandings of all-India officials, as we confirm in chapter 5. The culture of 'batchmates' and 'seniors/subordinates' is not to be underestimated: see Potter (1996).

Mending the state? Views from outside

It would be wrong to suggest that the relative scarcity of the state that we find in some parts of Bihar or West Bengal is replicated in the same degree across India. We shall comment in part III on recent experiments with decentralization in states including Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. At the same time, however, we need to pause before dismissing out of hand Vijay Nambisan's suggestion that Bihar is showing the rest of India its political future.[41] Barbara Harriss-White's corruscating analysis of society and economy in Tamil Nadu confirms that the criminalization of politics is well established in parts of South India, where 'The State is [also] used by the intermediate classes for accumulation rather than for legitimation' (Harriss-White 2003: 47). In her view, this large grouping of self-employed business people and surplus-producing farmers depends for its survival on the continued production of state subsidies for water and electricity (most notably) and state restrictions on competitive market structures. These classes thus define themselves against big business and economic liberalization, on the one hand, and against smallholders, the landless and the working class, on the other. In Tamil Nadu they also engage in precisely those social practices that we have come to associate with Bihar or UP: economic misdemeanours of all sorts (including adulteration, arbitrary deductions, tampering with weights and measures); economic crimes such as theft, fraud and unlicensed activity (including the tapping of electricity and TV cables); 'mafianization', or the pursuit of organized crime based on the privatization of physical security measures (usually with the direct or indirect involvement of MPs and MLAs); tax evasion on a dramatic scale; and the continual oppression of labour through low wage rates, causalization of contracts, the use of child labour, and the watering down of health and safety regimes.[42]

Harriss-White has no truck with the idea that liberalization is the solution to the problems of the state and politics in India. In her view, the continuing *de facto* privatization of the state in Tamil Nadu has been enhanced by the doctrines of economic liberalism, which have only worsened a more fundamental problem of state depletion (what we have called the production of the relative scarcity of functioning state institutions). For our purposes, however, it matters rather more that the state in India is now being produced amid a competing set of discourses which challenge many previous assumptions about the ways that ordinary people should

[41] 'Bihar is developing into one of the political possibilities open to democracy which increasingly looks like coming to fruition', Nambisan (2000: 8).
[42] This listing after Harriss White (2003: 64).

be asked to encounter the state. Some of these discourses propose only minor changes to the existing optic, as when parts of the organized labour movement seek a divorce between the trade unions and the political parties that have traditionally held them captive. On other occasions we can detect a more determined tack away from 'the state' in favour of 'the market' or 'the people' (or even both), and since we shall meet these ideas later in the book it makes sense to introduce them here. These ideas are important because they help to define the sightings of the state that are made by many of the people described within them.

Exit, Voice and Loyalty

We can usefully begin by revisiting a famous book by Albert Hirschman, a scholar whose work defies crude attempts to pigeon-hole the discourses of development studies in terms of Left and Right. Hirschman's account of *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* was first published in 1970 and returned him to problems he had encountered previously in the Nigerian railway system.[43] What interested Hirschman was the fact that the Nigerian Railway Corporation performed so badly even though it was faced with competition from long-distance road haulage companies. In his view, this paradox was explicable only in terms of the peculiar combination of exit and voice that he found in Nigeria: 'exit did not have its usual attention-focusing effect because the loss of revenue was not a matter of gravity for management [which could dip into the public treasury in times of deficit], while voice was not aroused and therefore the potentially most vocal customers were the first ones to abandon the railroads for the trucks' (Hirschman 1970: 45). Nigerians were then saddled with an inefficient and oversubsidized public railway system, and an arena of exchanges between officialdom and ordinary citizens which encouraged 'an oppression of the weak by the incompetent and an exploitation of the poor by the lazy' (Hirschman 1970: 59). The endless delays that railway users encountered, which began with long and perhaps unruly queues to get tickets in the first place, was caused, finally, by a 'combination of exit and voice [that] was particularly noxious' (Hirschman 1970: 45) and which made recovery unlikely.

In less subtle hands than Hirschman's this combination of exit and voice considerations is reduced to one or the other, with little attention being given to the ways in which the two can be combined to promote loyalty. For many neoliberals the overriding concern has been to secure a rolling back of the state in the developing world. The failure of the

[43] Hirschman (1967).

state is here diagnosed in terms of an excess of rent-seeking behaviour by public officials, and an absence of effective competition from or within the private sector. Ordinary people are bound to confront the state as a site of inefficiency and corruption as long as they are unable to exit from it. The promotion of quotas or affirmative action is precisely the wrong way to empower poorer people, for it further protects state agencies from effective and generalized public scrutiny. What starts as a system of compensatory discrimination designed to bring beneficiary populations up to the level of the average in ten or twenty years, is extended *ad nauseam* by the 'creamy layers' of the special interest groups that are thereby produced. What is required instead is the concerted promotion of employment opportunities in the private sector, and to this end a responsible state must first put in place responsible fiscal, monetary and foreign trade policies. Empowerment, in this discourse, need not begin in 'the locality' or with policies that are directly focused on the poor (in the sense of classic poverty-alleviation schemes). The geography of empowerment rather begins at the international and national levels with the prosecution of economic reforms. Disempowerment is a result of economic distortions, or distortions of an economic regime that would secure the maximization of individual utilities through unfettered markets.

At its crudest, a discourse of economic liberalism encourages a view of the state as a dead weight, or, worse, as the promoter of economic unreason, special interests and the continued impoverishment of the masses. Evan Osborne draws on this line of reasoning when he declares that government-dispensed rents of the order of 30–45 per cent of national income are channelled through India's reservations system and account for the 'inevitable Balkanization of Indian politics' (Osborne 2001: 679). In this specific respect his analysis comes close to that of Kanchan Chandra, but it is not clear from Osborne's paper that he accepts Chandra's suggestion that the continuation of the reservations system will empower (give voice to) a widening circle of ethnic groups in a second-best world of limited privatization. In any case, there is now growing recognition within the neoliberal camp that markets cannot be promoted in the absence of effective structures of governance. This moment of recognition falls short of Karl Polanyi's insights about the institutional, and thus irreducibly social, nature of real markets, but it has encouraged the World Bank, especially, to discount its earlier support for shock therapy in favour of sequenced economic reform initiatives that pay at least some attention to the political conditions and consequences of liberalization.[44] It has also encouraged the World Bank to fund surveys of public officials, as it

[44] Polanyi (2001 [1944]); see also Platteau (1994). See also World Bank (2001).

has done in Uttar Pradesh, in an attempt to see rather better how and why those officials might be persuaded to serve their 'clients' in a more transparent manner.

Accountability, participation and decentralization

Whether or not the World Bank will get its way on public service reforms in India is a moot point. Central government has long since declared its support for a gradual package of economic reforms, and if Barbara Harriss-White is right it will be the vested interests of India's intermediate classes, as much as the compulsions of 'centrist' politics, that will push the state to continue with a process of economic reforms that is distinguished by its partiality and uneven tempo. What is more certain is that the World Bank's strictures on good governance have been mimicked, joined, critiqued and rejected by a range of non-state actors (including opposition parties) that look at the problems of poverty alleviation and empowerment from a more heterodox stance. What then obtains is a continuum of reform proposals or political initiatives that begin on 'the Right' and which work their way round to the point where 'Left' and 'Right' are almost joined. Support for a strong exit option is only the most obvious expression of this tendency. Although post-developmentalism shares little in common with the Washington Consensus, the former favouring community where the latter favours markets, there is a strong measure of agreement in their shared disdain for *dirigisme*, or the idea that states can directly empower poorer people. In both cases, an agenda of state reform is viewed with deep suspicion.[45]

The anti-state agendas of the radical post-Left have undoubtedly coloured the perceptions of the state of at least some villagers in areas like Uttaranchal (the Chipko movements), the Narmada valley (the anti-dams struggles), and in and around firing ranges in Orissa or Jharkhand (including those at Balaipal and Neterhat).[46] We can assume, too, that some parts of this discourse will have played well in those areas where people have long expressed a strong distaste for outsiders, or where *dalits* and *adivasis* have been mobilized by Naxalite groups. The front cover of Ashis Nandy's recent book, *The Romance of the State and the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*, features a photograph by Krishna Murari Kishan which depicts a muscular village labourer being beaten by four policeman, one of whom stands poised to bring down his rifle on the man's head or shoulders. For Nandy, the state is an originary source of violence, and in his

[45] See Corbridge (1998); Kiely (1999) for commentaries.
[46] For an overview, see Routledge (2005).

vision of empowerment it must be opposed by a Gandhian moment of recovery of the self. This recovery happens through a process of psychic cleansing which rejects 'The beautiful prose, the laudable sentiments, and the languages of rationality and science [which] cover up . . . [the] criminal enterprise [which is everywhere built into] state formation and nation-building' (adapted from Nandy 2003: x).

For the most part, however, Left political parties, activists, and NGOs in India have been committed to an ideology of improved service delivery to the poor which makes demands of the state, rather than being straightforwardly against it. In the 1950s and 1960s this agenda was mainly concerned with increasing the share of total state resources that was available for spending on the poor. More recently there has been a concerted effort to bring pressure to bear on the state to make it responsive to the accounts that poorer people offer for their own poverty. It is here that hands are occasionally joined with the World Bank and other development agencies.

We see this clearly in the clamorous demands that have been voiced recently for participatory development initiatives.[47] Participation can mean different things to different people, as we shall see in part II, and can be more or less intensive.[48] It is evident, even so, than an ideology of participatory development sits easily beside demands for the greater voice of men and women in the political process, and in the selection of particular development projects. As we noted previously, the Employment Assurance Scheme is distinctive precisely because it is built around the assumption that registered labourer households should *demand* employment from the local state when they are in need of work. The EAS also calls for villagers to hold public meetings for the selection of work schemes and executing agents (contractors). In the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project, meanwhile, a substantial UK-funded aid project in Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal, well-defined groups of poorer men and/or women are required to be formed in order to make demands of Project officers.[49] The Project assumes not simply that poorer villagers will learn to deal with one another by forming these groups, but that they will gain bookkeeping and leadership skills and learn to deal with authority figures. The exit strategy of the Project calls for poorer villagers

[47] See our discussion in chapter 4. For a reasonably dispassionate overview, see McGee (2002).

[48] Perhaps the most incisive treatment is by Brett (2000). See also Platteau and Abrahams (2002).

[49] Kumar and Corbridge (2002). The EIRFP has backing from the Government of India and we come back to it, briefly and as part of a broader discussion of participation, in chapter 4.

to strengthen their stocks of linking social capital in order that they can make demands of the state when the aid money dries up.[50]

What is interesting about these interventions is that they constitute members of the rural poor as individuals who have a right to be treated as equals by the state and Project officials with whom they come into contact. The supposition, indeed, is that it is members of the rural poor who should be dictating to the state, and exercising their statutory rights and preferences. It is this suggestion that apparently stands behind the widow's claim to her pension as of right, and it is a supposition that is strengthened by linked demands for the greater accountability of public servants. As we said before, the strategy of the MKSS in Rajasthan is to make the state acutely visible to its clients and customers. In this vision, technology (a photocopier, the Internet) can be one means for bringing the citizen and the state into a supposedly unmediated encounter that offers each party an undistorted sighting of the other. Politicians and *dalaals* are cleared out of the way, and political society is made both more civil and transparent. In another vision the politicians remain in the picture, but they are supposed to be accountable to their electors through the *panchayati raj* institutions now in place across India. This is the agenda of decentralization, the precise meanings of which will vary sharply from place to place.[51] (The levels of decentralized decision-making and revenue control that are to be found in Kerala are only weakly copied in some other states, including in CPI-M-dominated West Bengal.)

All of these discourses are intent on changing the conditions under which different groups of poorer people are coming to see the state. Development studies must then be understood not simply as a discipline which looks in upon different societies in the 'Third World', or even as the locus of a set of policies which seek to repair the state and 'civil society' in some of those countries. Development studies must also be understood as a set of contending discourses which help poorer people to make sense of the state according to different accounts of gender, personal autonomy and the intrinsic worth of individuals. The interventions to which they give rise – including the many 'failures' which Ferguson reports, and which we document in part II – become part of the technologies that people make use of to see the state and to make demands of it. They

[50] Linking social capital refers to the mainly vertical ties that poorer people have with those in positions of power and influence. Bridging social capital refers to the ties between people from different community backgrounds, while bonding social capital refers to the much thicker ties that exist between people in a given family, kin or community group.

[51] We comment on these agendas in chapters 5 and 7. We would simply point out here that they make an appeal to an idea of direct or unmediated sight that we find instructive and yet unconvincing.

are as much constitutive of the process of sighting as they are a set of observations of those sightings.

Conclusion

We have tried in this chapter to provide a preliminary sketch of some of the issues that are involved in speaking about seeing the state. Sightings are always complex and take shape against the sightings of other individuals, communities and institutions. They also take place over the airwaves and on computer screens, as well as in paper copy, memory, speech and other direct interactions. The issues they engage, moreover, are very often deeply contested, and point in the direction of diverse political agendas. James Scott reminded us in the 1980s that peasants do not usually engage in highly visible or openly rebellious forms of politics. More often, they engage their antagonists by stealth and behind the scenes, mobilizing what he called 'the weapons of the weak'.[52] This is surely what we should expect. It is at one with what we know of rural or agrarian politics in India (allowing for the fact that some exchanges are open and aggressive), and quite consistent with the multiple sightings of the state and other political targets that we have pointed towards here.

To better understand how these multiple sightings are staged it is important that we turn our attention to specific localities and forms of encounter. This will be our task in part II, where we will focus in turn on questions of participation, governance and the contours of political society. We will show how recent accounts of the merits of participatory development are beginning to impact on at least some of the encounters that poorer people have with state officials. By the same token, we will maintain that demands for the increased ownership of development by participating poorer men and women itself constitutes a technology of rule (a structuring of state–society relations), and one that is sometimes radically at odds with the ambitions and capabilities of poorer people and state officials alike. A similar argument will be advanced in respect of good governance. Akhil Gupta is right to maintain that 'the discourse of corruption, by marking those actions that constitute an infringement of [legally defined] rights . . . acts to represent the rights of citizens to themselves' (Gupta 1995: 389). At the same time, however, as we shall show, the practices of corruption are always complicated by the multiple pressures which bear upon government staff occupying different positions

[52] Scott (1985). We cannot say for sure when this phrase was first used, but Gandhi referred to 'the weapons of the weak' in *Hind Swaraj* (1997 [1908]).

in a line department, say, or as a result of their links to (or dependence upon) local politicians.

Before we turn to this task, however, or to a more general discussion of the politics of state–poor encounters (part III), we want to consider how several key sites for state–poor interactions have been produced by the state itself through its longstanding, variegated, and recently changing 'war on poverty'. In chapter 2 we consider how different governments and state agencies have sought to define, bound and even invent 'the poor' by means of interlocking and sometimes conflicting discourses about depravity, demography, income levels and affirmative action. We also report on how the war on poverty has been waged since the end of the 1960s. At this point, too, we direct attention towards several of the spaces for state–poor interactions that we consider further in part II, and which make particular claims about the importance and merits of good governance and participation. Here, of course, is our link back to the concerns of contemporary development studies, always a focal point for analysis, and to the work of scholars as diverse as Merilee Grindle, Arturo Escobar and Robert Chambers.