

Book Reviews

Dynamics of State Formation: India and Europe Compared: India and Europe Compared, Martin Doornbos and Sudipta Kaviraj (Ed.), (Indo-Dutch Studies on Development Alternatives – 19), Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1997, pp. 441, Price Rs. 475.

The origin of this publication goes back to a Seminar held in New Delhi in March 1990 on the Comparative Study of State Formation Processes in India and Europe. This seminar was organized and funded by the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development. This volume contains a selection of Sixteen Contributions which were first presented at this seminar. All these contributions have been revised and reworked since.

The volume opens with a comprehensive and learned introduction by the editors which describes the nature and significance of the subject and delineates the scheme of its exposition. The discussions are ably concluded at the end of the volume by two chapters. These two chapters are : (1) State Formation in India by Ravindu Kumar and (2) European Social Transformation and European Culture by Jan Berting.

The main thrust of the discussion is to emphasize that States have history; they are not mere legal constructions; they have evolved over a period of time. States are important leaders in the affairs of citizens. States have been shaped by a variety of influences and among these are religion, language, caste, culture, community etc. It is emphasized that for the proper understanding of the origin and nature of States, we should know the historical process through which States have passed.

The main objective of the Seminar, as well as, of the volume under review is to study and compare the process of state formation in India and Europe. They found it legitimate and useful to compare India with the continent of Europe. The two are comparable in terms of the number of people, the space involved and interval diversity in cultural and political terms. But the comparison should not be stressed too far because there are divergent tendencies in India and Europe. European States are seeking a more extensive form of political union and the creation of a single market. Nation – States are being eroded by the emergence of Supra-national authorities, by formations larger than nations. In Third World societies, on the other hand, there is a tendency towards smaller regional or ethnically based communities. There is a danger of the State disintegrating into smaller fragments. In India, the States were reorganized on the basis of language which process resulted in the break-up of earlier political formations. And this process is still on. The Government of India have recently announced their intention to carve out new States out of Uttar Pradesh. The States are not moving in any uniform or universal direction. Ethnical affinity appears to be the major driving force behind these new formations in the making. Economic development, technological development and technological culture, information technology are some of the new forces influencing State formation.

With the bewildering variety of language, culture, religion, caste and customs, etc., it is sometimes felt whether it would be more appropriate to redefine India as a "Civilization State" rather than a Nation-State. The very notion of State appears to be in a flux.