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PERFORMANCE, PATRONAGE AND POLITICS

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'Political man', Lasswell claimed, 'is a deceptive creature; he imposes his private motives on public objects, but he does so in a manner that few can see through.' Following is the formula that conveyed Lasswell's view:

P} d} r = P

Where the initial P refers to private motives; d equals displacement onto a public object; r equals rationalization in terms of public interest; P equals political man; and = equals transformed into'

Politicians, according to Lasswell, were really actors in disguise. They engaged in ritualistic displacement of motives . Thus, Lasswell argued "political prejudice, preferences and creeds are often formulated in highly rational form, but they are grown in highly irrational ways". Lasswell's approach reduced politics to a form of catharsis.

H.D. Lasswell, "Psychopathology and Politics", (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972) P.75-76

The focus of my paper is on the multi-dimensional interpenetration of culture and politics, knowledge and power, society and state. Pre-modern monarchical state structures in India, ancient as well as medieval, allowed a fair amount of autonomy to the socio-cultural life of the people. Yet, state patronage of arts and culture in pre-modem as well as modem times has basically been a

function of the state designed to manufacture an intellectual and moral leadership to strengthen its hold over society. The Kautilyan notion of *dharma* and *danda* provided the ancient metaphors for the modern consent/coercion ingredients of the hegemonisitic state. After consolidating his hold over the Mauryan empire by war and coercion, Ashoka of the third and the fourth century B.C. resorted to propagation of Buddhism to establish an ethical and moral order conducive to his rule over the conquered people. Similarly, after consolidating the Mughal empire, Akbar in the sixteenth century was actively engaged in propagating the religio-cultural order of Din-i-Ilahi to generate consent for his rule. The Chola kings, particularly Rajendra Chola of the twelfth century, made Tanjore the focus of culture and politics. He brought some four hundred devadasis from small temples to Tanjore. These women were provided houses and other amenities by the temple authorities under the patronage of the king. The performers served to create an awe among the people about the divine powers of the king. Temples patronized by kings thus functioned as socio-cultural centres of village life and in turn generated popular acceptance for the rule of the king.

In the modern age of ‘class societies’, however, in order to engineer consent for the ethico-political and intellectual-moral leadership of the dominant classes over the dominated classes, state patronage of arts and culture has acquired new dimensions. The subjugation of Indian society and culture from the mid-eighteenth century onwards under colonial rule was a tragedy of epic proportions. the reverberations of which are reflected in the everyday chaos, confusion, and conflict prevailing in the contemporary polity, society and culture of post-colonial India. Colonization of the country for about two hundred years following the Battle of Plassey (1757) marked a break in state patronage of indigenous arts and culture. After independence, the post-colonial state therefore invested heavily in creating naticnal ‘autonomous’ institutions of arts and culture like Sahitya Akademi, Lalit Kala Akademi, Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National School of Drama. Doordarshan, All India Radio, Directorate of Films Festivals,

libraries. universities, museums, surveys and cultural centres, and funded schemes and programmes for financial assistance to artists working in various fields. Starved as they were of political patronage during the colonial era, the creative community got uncritically absorbed in the hegemonic institutional apparatuses of the state after independence. State patronage in post-colonial India thus resulted in the arts losing their role as a means of resistance against the dominance of the ruling classes, comprising the urban bourgeoisie, the rural elite, and the professional middle class. As a result, we have hardly witnessed any serious cultural and intellectual resistance to the hegemony of the state in post-colonial India. On the other hand, creative energy has often been channelled into erotic performances of plays like Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal,* Chandrashekhar Kambar's *Aks Tamasha,* or Girish Karnad's *Agni aur Barkha.* The French philosopher Michel Foucault has penetratingly deconstructed the workings of modern regimes and their use of sexual discourse in arts and literature to divert resistance movements.

Culture has played a dialectical role vis-a-vis politics. Foucault rightly captures this dialectics in these words: "Wherever there is power, there is resistance." While the civil society led by the state has always engaged in legitimization exercises by patronizing arts and culture, the subaltern classes, since time immemorial, have resorted to cultural idioms and symbols to resist the rule and ideas of the dominant classes.

Going beyond Marx's formulation of the workings of capital, and the 'rational bureaucratization' of modern societies propounded by Max Weber, thinkers of the twentieth century have delved deep into the interrelationship of culture and politics. Mahatma Gandhi's use of cultural idioms and symbols as a means of resisting the military-economic-political domination of the colonial state gave a new dimension to the role of culture as a weapon of resistance. Besides Mahatma Gandhi, the works of Antonio Gramsci, Foucault, Frantz Fanon, and Paulo Freire have also given new insights into the complex dialectics of politics

and culture. Gramsci's account of hegemony focused on the role of civil society in creating consent for the state. Gandhi illustrated the use of indigenous cultural idioms and symbols like 'ahimsa, satyagraha and *charkha* to resist the colonial violence, political subjugati.on, and capitalist exploitation of India. Frantz Fanon has highlighted the socio-cultural consequences of colonization of the polity, economy and society of a subjugated people in the context of the decolonization of the Third World during the mid-twentieth century. Paulo Freire has shown how an oppressed people get submerged in the oppressive reality of life created by their rulers, and has emphasized the role of culture in creating critical consciousness among the oppressed, which is necessary for their liberation. Foucault has demonstrated the inner workings of the modern state apparatus which controls the everyday life of the people by cultural and ideological indoctrination. He rightly says that pre-modem kings had the power to take away our lives, but the modem state, by regulating every aspect of our life, dehumanizes our everyday existence.

I have reflected here on the abstract workings of the interplay between politics and culture. State power does not operate only through the concrete and visible organs of police or army, but also in capillary forms through the civil society, media, 'autonomous' institutions, nominations, invitations, committees, programmes, meetings, sponsorships, functions, sanctions, approvals and rejections, fellowships and awards, recognition and punishment. I have attempted to explain the multi-dimensional interpenetration of performance, patronage and politics from the need of the ruling classes to create an intellectual and moral leadership. The divine monarchical metaphors of Chakravartin, Rajadhiraj, Samrat, Shahenshah, Jahanpanah, Sultan, Badshah, and Kaiser-e-Hind were all part of the hegemonic projects of the particular kings/states conducted through elaborate religious-cultural rituals. The elaborate award ceremonies, national day functions, and other state celebrations of today are similarly performances put up by the state to establish its hegemony.

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