‘Advance Mysore!’: The Cultural Logic of a Developmental State

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What governs state interests in development in formerly colonised societies? Conventional social science accounts stress politico-economic variables, particularly the need for capital accumulation. By means of a detailed analysis of the Bhadravati Iron Works, an ambitious industrial project in the state of Mysore in colonial India, it is demonstrated that mechanisms are also important in state-led development. Locational disadvantages, technical problems, and increased production costs made the iron plant an unprofitable venture from its inception. The state, however, kept the plant operational on grounds of its pedagogic value for local society. A claim for civilisational recognition for India’s capacity for development, which was expressed from within the conceptual parameters of mercantilist, social evolutionist and orientalist thought, provides the cultural logic of the developmental state in Mysore.

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ocial science scholarship on the developmental state has provided only formal internalist explanations; that is, it has presumed the latter as a political entity committed to fostering economic growth and then proceeded to theorise the institutional conditions of its effective functioning or otherwise (Amsden 1989; Evans 1995; Johnson 1982; Kohli 2004; Lange and Rueschemeyer 2005; Sikkink 1991; Wade 1990). A recent definition of the developmental state illustrates this primacy of the economic focus: “We define developmental states as organisational complexes in which expert and coherent bureaucratic agencies collaborate with organised private sector to spur national economic transformation” (Doner, Ritchie and Slater 2005: 328).

Cultural anthropologists have studied the social trajectories of the discourses and technologies of development (Ferguson 1994; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Li 2007; Scott 1998). They have, however, sidestepped crucial questions. Under what historical conditions did “development” become an attractive option for states? How do the state actors conceive “backwardness” and “development” while elaborating policy? Engaging these questions will uncover the cultural logic that governs practices of state-led development and broaden the conceptual expanse of “the developmental state”. With a view towards enabling a new discussion in this area, I suggest that the developmental states be viewed as states that perceive their primary obligations to be those of furthering the goals of “development”, which are a composite of cultural and economic elements. For a state to be developmental, therefore, it is sufficient if it organises its self-identity around the concept of “development”. Whether such a self-identification is purely symbolic or not should not determine its eligibility for being considered a developmental state. On the contrary, a state that merely claims to be developmental while not being one in practice is itself a puzzle worthy of sociological investigation. Instead of arguing against institutional analyses, this paper points out the scholarly need for also examining the cultural logic that governs the state-led practices of development.

Re-contextualising Development

Harry Truman’s 1949 presidential address, which declared the obligation of the western countries towards the “underdeveloped areas” of the world, is usually seen as the originary moment of development discourse (Escobar 1995; Esteva 1992). Some have noted that the British and French used the discourse of development to legitimise their colonial rule in the 1940s and that it subsequently found official endorsement in decolonising states (Cooper and Packard 1997: 7). The intellectual lineage of
development as a state-supported discourse extends further back in time. During the late 19th century itself, the colonised elite in Latin America and Asia shared conceptions of development similar to those seen in the post-1940 era (Baud 1998; Gootenberg 1993; Gowda forthcoming). Accounting for this longer historical legacy of the discursive apparatus of “development” revises scholarly conceptions of developmental states as post-second world war political phenomena and better contextualises their rise to global prominence.

My research on the state of Mysore in colonial India uncovers the colonial legacy of development thought. The Mysore state elite’s concept of development was a creative amalgam of diverse intellectual strands: Friedrich List’s mercantilism, European ideas of social evolutionism and a whole body of orientalist discourses denying the self-worth of the colonised subjects. The elite’s programmes for developing Mysore sought to assert India’s/Mysore’s self-worth contra orientalist stereotypes; therefore, I argue, the need for civilisational recognition formed the cultural logic underlying the elite’s efforts at development.

Origins of a Developmental State

Two-fifths of the territory of colonial India consisted of “Native States” or “Indian States”, whose rulers had pledged their loyalty to the British and, in return, obtained partial autonomy in running their administrative affairs. “Indirect rule” refers to this strategy of extracting political compliance along with annual financial and military tributes from the local rulers in exchange for semi-autonomy in administering their states (Fisher 1991).

After directly administering Mysore between 1831 and 1881, the British brought it under indirect rule and made a descendant of the previous ruling family its ruler. Mysore was the third largest Indian state in colonial India. In 1900, its population was around 50 lakhs, 90% of whom lived in agricultural villages. Land revenue was the most important source of state revenue; it formed 65% and 43% of the state revenue in 1881 and 1910, respectively. The state’s decision-making authority was concentrated in the state elite, which consisted of the ruler, the dewan (prime minister) and senior civil servants.

Within the structure of opportunities afforded by indirect rule, the Mysore state elite implemented many programmes of industrial development. These programmes were planned almost entirely by the state elite, without any organised pressure from business or merchant groups. What were the institutional factors that allowed the state elite to pursue these initiatives? Under the framework of British indirect rule, they enjoyed significant institutional freedom to do so. Further, the decision-making powers were concentrated in the state elite; the majority of the people in rural areas had little influence over the state’s administrative machinery. Lastly, the state had surplus capital to spare for its projects. However, any of these institutional factors or a combination of them cannot explain why the state elite chose industrial development from the field of available options. Seeking civilisational recognition, I argue, with respect to India’s capacity for development was the cultural logic governing their interests in this regard.

Around 1909, with the growing strength of the Indian nationalist struggle, the British attempted to secure the support of native states through adopting “the so-called laissez-faire policy” towards them, which allowed them greater political autonomy (Low 1978: 374). Also, there was “the growing experience in India itself of how princely states could, if they were only left to their own devices, ‘modernise’ their governments – provided the ruler was willing, and a forceful dewan was somehow available” (ibid: 378). James Manor notes that the rulers and dewans of Mysore, were “heroes in the eyes of nationalists throughout India…, since they provided evidence of how splendidly Indians could govern themselves” (Manor 1978).

The Discursive Milieu

Economic historians have noted the heavy influence of Friedrich List’s mercantilist thought on nationalist economic ideas in 19th century India (Chakravarty 1997; Ganguli 1977; Goswami 2004). Arguing that Adam Smith’s advocacy of a worldwide laissez-faire would make an already dominant economic power like England the most powerful nation in the world, List upheld the necessity of protectionism for less industrialised countries like France, Germany and Italy. His prescription that the latter should actively shield and foster their “infant industries” by imposing tariffs on imports from industrially advanced nations appealed strongly to Indian economic thinkers, who urged the British to espouse a similar policy in India. The mercantilist envisioned a territorially bound productivist economy where a paternalist state actively fostered its economy, using local natural resources and labour maximally. Nationalist economic thinkers like Ranade and Gokhale, who were closely associated with the Mysore dewans, enabled List’s ideas to influence the state elite’s model of development (Gowda, forthcoming).

In keeping with the 19th century European evolutionist views of history, the Mysore state elite also understood industrialisation as development. In 1881, the first dewan of Mysore acknowledged “the great need to stir up industrial enterprise and progress” (cited in Gustafson 1969). In 1917, a later dewan declared: “If we want to know in what direction to move, we must compare ourselves with, and be guided by the experience of, progressive countries” (Visvesvaraya 1917). These affirmations did not remain mere manifestos. The state elite initiated numerous programmes to industrialise Mysore such as the construction of hydroelectric and irrigation projects and an iron plant (Hettne 1978). In their teleological vision of development, agriculture was viewed as a sector sure to become marginal in the future. In 1926, the department of agriculture declared that its main concern was to raise the condition of the Mysore village, “in the fullness of time, to the level of the urban life of England or America” (RPA 1926).

These evolutionist certitudes articulated with the orientalist myths of oriental despotism, religious fatalism and the lazy native, among others. The state elite’s interests in development were grounded in these myths, which emphasised India’s inherent backwardness and justified colonial rule. Dewan M Visvesvaraya’s speech illustrates the state elite’s view of Indians as essentially religious people:

“The nationality of our people rests on a religious and fatalistic basis, not on an economic basis, as in the West. If we are to follow in the wake of other countries in the pursuit of material prosperity, we must
give up aimless activities and bring our ideals in line with the standards of the West, namely, to spread education in all grades, multiply occupations and increase production and wealth (Visvesvaraya 1917: 149; emphases mine).

In formulating development programmes, the Mysore state elite accepted the validity of orientalist claims about Indians but believed they could be overcome.

Civilisational Recognition
A key interest underlying the elite’s programmes for developing Mysore was to seek civilisational recognition for the India’s capacity for achieving progress. The acceptance of the coloniser’s inferior representations of the colonised by the latter has been powerfully discussed by Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aime Cesaire and Ashis Nandy. In response to the institutionalised and everyday colonial humiliation, the colonised expressed their capacity to be sovereign agents variously. The Mysore elite’s efforts at demonstrating their capacity for development is one such response.

Mysore was the first Indian state to have a representative assembly, a deliberative body without powers of legislation, whose members included landlords, merchants and intellectuals nominated by the state. When the Mysore Representative Assembly (MRA) was founded in 1881, a Madras-based newspaper noted:

A new experiment is being tried in the Mysore state whose progress would be extremely interesting to watch because it has been frequently asserted that Eastern nations are not fitted for such councils or such a Government as that of England or the United States. For many centuries before our time, Hindoos (sic) have been despotically governed; so very few of them have actually taken part in the government of their country that they know not what real political freedom and true representative government mean (Madras Times 1881).

MRA was seen as an endeavour that could prove India’s capacity for self-government. Further evidence for this dynamic of civilisational recognition comes from a different geopolitical context. In countering the South African government’s argument that Indians did not deserve voting rights in South Africa since they had never exercised franchise in India, Mohandas Gandhi’s address to the Natal Legislative Assembly in 1894 noted: “The State of Mysore has at the present moment a representative parliament, called the Mysore Assembly, on the exact model of the British Parliament” (Gandhi [1894] 1958: 144-47).

Japan was an inspiration for the Mysore state elite. In the early part of the 20th century, Mysore sent official delegations to Japan to learn about Japanese administration and economic policy. The editor of a local weekly noted: “Japan is an oriental country which has marched forward with the West, and a country which has done it within the shortest space of time...Mysore may not be Japan but it has nothing to lose by envying Japan, studying Japan and by following Japan!” (Josyer 1930: 47). Comparisons like these were legion in public discourses in Mysore. Invoking Japan as a country that had disproved myths about the backwardness of eastern societies also served to proclaim Mysore’s own capacity for development.

The elite’s conception of moral-political competence rested on their acceptance of a social and historical ontology contained in the discursive infrastructure of colonialism. The elite discourses oscillated between self-particularising and self-universalising gestures, where orientalism provided the terms of the particular (“India is essentially backward”) and social evolutionism provided those of the universal (“All societies pass through the same historical stages”). While their self-particularising acts occasion pathos, their self-identification with a deracinated realm of temporal progress summons the grounds of political agency. Their epic claims for civilisational recognition, directed to imagined western and local audiences, extended justificatory premises for the state’s development interventions.

Through an analysis of the state’s policy documents, official correspondence, speeches of statesmen and newspaper discussions related to the ambitious establishment of an iron plant, I argue that a claim for civilisational recognition, whose discursive coordinates included the certitudes of mercantilism, social evolutionism and orientalism, governed the elite’s interests in development.

The Bhadravati Iron Works
The state elite had shown an interest in “modern” iron production in the late 19th century. In 1890, Dewan Seshadri Iyer had affirmed that no industry was likely to advance Mysore’s material prosperity as effectually and as rapidly as that of iron (AOD 1914: 99). Since iron was perceived to be a basic industry that would eventually lead to the creation of other industries, Mysore decided to establish an iron plant in 1915.

The iron plant resulted out of the interactions of various actors: the ruler, dewans, geologists, engineers, businessmen, chemists and forest officials. In 1896, a retired state geologist recommended the establishment of a large charcoal iron smelting works to utilise the “splendid” ores of the Bababudan hills in Mysore (Foote 1900: 5). The state geologist was assigned to study the operations of a blast furnace at Turin, Italy (Smeeth 1909: 1). Based on his observations at Turin, the geologist noted two major obstacles for producing iron in Mysore: the lack of local supplies of coke and charcoal and the high costs of importing them (ibid: 41).

In 1915, the state commissioned Charles Perin, the American consulting engineer of the privately owned Tata Iron and Steel & Co (TISCO), the first modern iron and steel plant in India, to undertake a preliminary study of the possibilities for starting an iron plant in Mysore. Perin’s report endorsed the economic viability of founding an iron plant in Mysore (Perin 1916). Since Mysore lacked coal deposits and was distant from coal fields, he suggested that pig iron be manufactured and that charcoal, the proposed fuel, be obtained by burning wood from the thick forests surrounding Benkipura,8 the proposed site for the iron plant (ibid: 4).9 The site’s proximity to the iron mining area, the forests and a river made it a suitable location for the iron plant. The Mysore state registered TISCO as its managing agents on 4 June 1918.10

Perin’s estimated availability of a market for Mysore’s manufactured iron in British India and abroad was misplaced. As the TISCO representative noted, “the principal markets for iron and steel” were distant from Mysore (SMPIS 1923: 12-14). The start-up facilities for the iron plant would be hard to obtain due to the adverse market conditions induced by the first world war (ibid). In a note to Sri Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV, the ruler of Mysore, M Visvesvaraya advised that the state must bear the war-induced cost increases of factory machinery since the world market
conditions would normalise only after “four or five years” by which time the iron plant in Mysore would be fully operational (ibid: 11-12). He also added: “We should be prepared for difficulties and losses in some directions” (ibid). Approving this scheme, Mysore’s ruler sanctioned Rs 120 lakh towards this venture for a three year period (ibid: 12).

Stiff opposition arose in some official quarters in Mysore to the proposed iron plant and the terms of the state’s agreement with the Managing Agent (SPMIS 1923: 22-23, 43-50). Albion Banerji, an important member of the Mysore Legislative Council, doubted the reliability of Perin’s data. He also argued that the first world war had made the costs of establishing an iron plant exorbitant and made it difficult to obtain the required building material (Banerji 1917: 31-38). More importantly, it was not advisable to install a blast furnace when the tramways to transport forest wood to the plant had still not been built. It was “unfair” that a revenue producing forest department was being asked to deliver free wood to make charcoal available for the iron plant (ibid: 37). Another objection was that the managing agents had not shoulered any risk. They were entitled to a commission on construction costs and on any possible profits from the sale of iron for a period of 25 years, whereas the state was entirely responsible for securing all arrangements for obtaining the two crucial raw materials, wood fuel and iron ore, whose costs were seen to have been underestimated in Perin’s report. In response, the ruler of Mysore clarified that the venture’s importance merited shoulder the risks (Campbell 1917: 78).

The Mysore state pursued its plans for an iron plant in full awareness of serious risks: the markets for its products were not known, the quality of the ore was uncertain and the process of making charcoal from forest wood had not been ascertained. The state’s interests in the plant presumed that a modern iron plant would aid in the industrialisation of Mysore and thereby recover the investment expenses.

Completed in 1923, the Bhadravati Iron Works (BIW) was “one of the first large-scale industrial enterprises run by the state anywhere in India” (Bagchi 1972: 324). The plant was designed by Messrs. Perin and Marshall of New York and took three years for the managing agents to build. A series of logistical problems such as delays in building the tramways for transporting forest wood to the iron plant and the aerial ropeway for transporting ore from the mines on the mountain top, difficulties of acquiring factory machinery due to the adverse market conditions induced by the first world war, and the undetermined quality of iron ore obstructed the smooth completion of the plant. Also, unforeseen expenses had increased the original cost estimate of Rs 64 lakh to 114 lakh in 1922.13 Iron production at BIW commenced in early 1923.14

BIW incurred heavy losses continuously for the first 15 years; by 1930, its losses totalled Rs 2.5 crore (Ismael 1930: 108).15 The nature of the project made losses inevitable. Markets for pig iron were not cheaply accessible from Bhadravati. Transporting iron ore and forest-wood to the iron plant increased the total production costs. Mysore did not have a port; and, the costs of using rail for transporting the manufactured iron to the nearest port would have offset any possible profits. Thus, it was difficult for BIW to compete with TISCO and the Indian Iron and Steel Company, the two major producers of pig iron in British India. Located near the rich coal fields and engineering industries in Bengal, these companies produced coke pig iron at economical rates and controlled the iron market in north India. In Mysore, the engineering industries were few and the demand for pig iron insignificant (Bagchi 1972: 325-26).

Local newspapers criticised the state’s continued support for the loss-making plant. The members of the MRA suggested that the state’s resources would be better spent on education and health. The destruction of forests to provide charcoal to the iron plant and lack of interest in replanting in deforested areas came under heavy criticism too. However, none of these criticisms questioned the epistemic privilege of “development”. In response, the state elite invoked the involvement of experts and technologically sound knowledge with this project to represent the iron plant as a rational, scientific enterprise where the risk factors were firmly in control.16 They also argued that BIW performed a valuable pedagogic function of socialising locals into the virtues of industrial society.

A K Bagchi records that BIW “survived because of the willingness of the government to pour more money into it as a defensive investment when the supposed advantages of charcoal iron and wood distillation products had been wiped out by technical change and the depression” (Bagchi 1972: 327-28). BIW reported a profit for the first time only in 1939. The cultural factors that underwrote the “willingness of the government” to support the loss-making unit are explained below.

The Mercantilist Influence

The mercantilist influence is manifest in Mysore’s decision to set up the iron factory. In 1922, a representative of the Managing Agent wrote to Dewan Banerji:17

The patriotism limits the Government’s opportunities of space and time and person. The Mysore Government, for example, does not wish to export its ore where it could be used to great advantage, but wants to work it out within the State. It has a fancy for not looking out into the world for the best men, but the cry “Mysore for the Mysoreans”, though it is not averse to looking out for markets for its products outside the State; and it is not willing to wait for industries to grow; it wants to develop Mysore industrially (MRA 1924: 26; emphasis mine).

Mysore did not want to earn revenue by exporting iron ore; it wanted to establish its own iron factory with the use of its own labour. Demanding that the British government in India provide protection to Indian industry, the director of the department of industries in Mysore noted: “Among metals, iron is the most important from the manufacturing point of view and countries that are able to produce it occupy a leading place in manufactures” (D’Souza 1922: 248). Since iron production was perceived as a basic industry that eventually led to the creation of other industries, it was of paramount importance to establish one in Mysore.

The state was guided by a production-centric model of the economy, where production was given a pre-eminent role in the creation of economic value. For developing its economy, Mysore wanted to harness the productive capacities of its own people. The category of labour was mediated through a valorisation of national identity. On scrutinising the draft of the proposed
agreement between Mysore and its managing agent, Mysore's legal consultant observed:

...it is clear that the Dewan’s chief object was that Mysoreans should be trained for the higher offices of the undertaking... A provision should be inserted in the agreement making it obligatory on the part of the Company to train local people and re-place all outsiders, barring a select few to be settled by mutual agreement, within the first five or ten years of the operation period (Rao 1917: 51).

The 1917 final draft of the agreement accommodated the legal consultant’s request: “xix. The Company shall so far as conveniently possible employ natives of Mysore in connection with the business of the said works” (SPMIS 1923: 111).

By 1927, the 12 American technicians working at BiW had returned to their country. The maharaja congratulated M Visvesvaraya, who was now the Chairman of BiW’s Board of Management, for running the plant with Mysore’s labour: “(Mr Perin) was particularly struck by the fact that you were able to dispense with all American labour, and were managing entirely with our own men. It is an achievement which the State should be proud of” (Visvesvaraya 1960: 88-89).

Towards the late 1920s, Mysore’s mercantilist imagination of the economy became affiliated with the nationalist politics of swadeshi, which had emerged in British India in 1905 with the aim of making India economically self-reliant and ending its dependence on the British market. At the Swadeshi Exhibition in Mysore in 1932, Dewan Mirza Ismail declared:

The spirit of Swadeshism that is now pervading the country (India) is to be welcomed... So far as our own State is concerned, we can do very much further in the process of making it a more self-contained economic unit. There are a good many things which we should be able to produce ourselves. We have the Iron Works, a formidable undertaking indeed, which will, with most of, if not all, produce the cast iron and steel goods we need (Ismail 1937: 121-22).

Social Evolutionism

Iron smelting had been done in Mysore since at least the late 18th century. But the brutality of the colonial market mechanisms that allowed for the sale of cheap British made iron articles and the Mysore state’s own indifference had had technocidal consequences for the local iron smelters. In 1923, M Visvesvaraya released a press statement:

The manufacture of iron, as any one can see from old workings, was at one time a profitable industry in several districts of the State and it was practised with success within the memory of some people living. Invention and commerce have changed the whole aspect of the industry within the past 75 years, and Mysore lost ground, because she failed to keep pace with the growth of technical knowledge, scientific working and world conditions, with the result that the industry decayed and gradually died out... And a most natural preliminary in any scheme of industrial development was to restore this old industry in its modern form. Such was the genesis of the Bhadravati project (Visvesvaraya 1923: 3; emphasis mine).

The discourse of development, which posited a social evolutionary scheme with scientific and technological progress as the end stage, enabled Visvesvaraya to narrate the loss of the old iron industry as both inevitable and desirable. Michael Adas has shown that scientific and technological progress came to be perceived as a sign of civilisational and racial superiority in the late 19th century: “By the last decades of the 19th century, British colonisers – whether missionaries, explorers, or government officials – tended to measure “evolutionary distance” in terms of technological development” (Adas 1989: 310). In pushing for a modern iron plant, Mysore's conduct, therefore, was in keeping with the standard of a global measure that consecrated only some countries as civilised. The state elite’s progressivist historical narrative occluded the conflictual relation between themselves and the local iron smelters. The destruction of the livelihood for the iron smelters was also written out of it. In 1941, the state's social evolutionist aspirations became obvious in its ruler's wish that Bhadravati should become the “Birmingham of Mysore” (Wadiyar 1944: 39).

Orientalist Discourses

Evolutionary schemes of historical progress articulated with orientalist discourses in Mysore. The latter had objectified eastern societies as the opposite of western societies: the east was non-modern, non-rational and backward whereas the west inhabited the space of modernity, rationality and progress. These civilisational self definitions were a crucial accomplice of colonial rule. For the colonial elite in Mysore (and many other colonial settings), who subscribed to these civilisational essentialisms, industrial development was a means for achieving social progress and as such, its goals were larger than those of sole wealth creation. The iron plant was a civilising agent that would lead Mysore towards a modern social order.

The Pedagogical Value of BiW

The state elite justified establishing BiW on grounds of its pedagogical value for producing a disciplined labour force and socialising them into the virtues of industrial civilisation. A report of the 1917 business negotiations between the Mysore state and its managing agent records that, “the interest of His Highness’s Government in this concern is primarily the training of men even more than the making of profits...” (SPMIS 1923: 11). Local labour in Mysore appeared deficient in contrast with an idealised image of modern industrial labour. It was in need of training, an objective more important to achieve than profits.

In 1923, in response to the apprehensions about BiW’s financial viability, M Visvesvaraya observed that the BiW staff lacked confidence and that the state should continue to support the plant to instil confidence in them. Normative commitments to industrial modernity enjoy an unexamined authority in this view: the inadequacy is located within the workers, not with the nature of the undertaking itself.

Discipline, an attribute seen as indispensable for the success of industry, was also seen to be lacking among the labourers. Shortly before resigning as the chairman of BiW in 1929, M Visvesvaraya advised his successors: “Discipline is fair but should be pronounced still slack if judged by the best European and American standards... As the work is new and our officials and workmen unaccustomed to modern industrial life, they need cautious and sympathetic handling” (Visvesvaraya 1929: 523).

The workers lacked discipline by the comparative standards of discipline perceived to exist in European and American
labourers. The state elite now had to inculcate discipline among the workers. Also, as the Mysore workers were new to “modern industrial life”, they needed “cautious and sympathetic handling”. The elite’s paternalistic discourse of the iron plant’s pedagogic functions denied any contradiction between the state’s interests and those of labour.

Sharing many of the theoretical premises of the colonial discourses of the civilising mission and the state elite’s justifications for establishing biw, public discussions in Mysore often referred to the need for Mysoreans to be educated into appreciating the virtues of industrial civilisation. The revenue department head declared that “the want of an industrial bent on the part of the population as a whole is one of the main causes that have impeded industrial development in Mysore” (D’Souza 1932: 7). biw was perceived as fulfilling an important need in this regard; therefore, its value was also justified on the basis of its pedagogic functions. Such abstract prescriptions for becoming modern, which circulated in the print discussions in Mysore, were part of the same discursive field in which the state’s developmental rationality was anchored. The following section will reveal the power of the abstract certitudes of development discourse in discussions outside the official spheres of deliberation.

Reports of the iron plant’s continuing losses appeared in major English newspapers such as The Hindu and The Times of India and reached major Indian cities like Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Numerous articles defending the iron plant on the basis of its pedagogic value to Mysore also appeared in newspapers. A retired engineer from Bombay observed:

(N)ext to the Iron and Steel Industry of Tata’s at Jamshedpur, Mysore is the only place in India where such a rare undertaking of surpassing educational interest and economic value has been started...The charge against the generality of educated Indians is, that they are loathe to do manual labour and are not so keen on the practical side. Every Indian, Mysoreans in particular, should be proud that the Iron Works have been metamorphosing Indian habits, and there is little doubt that, with due opportunities and in time, they are sure to take their stand along with the European in every respect. From the above it seems that to construe the Iron Works as a purely State Industrial concern and no more, and to assess its value by its present finances is to deny to it its incalculable educational value to Mysore, and the prospective material prosperity it has most assuredly in store...Every day spent on the Works, raises, though to a microscopic extent, the average industrial level of the Mysorean (Iyengar 1925: 297-99).

biw had been habituating Indians to the demands of industrial society. This metamorphosis effectively countered the orientalist accusation of the Indians’ incompetence at technical professions. The engineer asked that the enterprise’s “incalculable educational value” also be considered and further advised that the state charge an “industrial educational cess” to manage the plant’s losses (ibid: 300)! The iron plant’s continued operation raised “the average industrial level of the Mysorean”, which was necessary for people to move into an industrial society.

Although, another news item claimed, American steel companies were financially more successful than biw, the latter was more profitable than its American counterparts on the register of “educative value” (Evening Mail 1927). These views are grounded in presuppositions regarding the processes whereby the west had become modern and eastern societies like India could become modern. Cultural deficiencies specific to Mysore were seen to exist, which made the locals ill-equipped for progress.

In 1928, P C Ray, the legendary chemist observed that biw was “a training ground where people develop the industrial sense...I exclaim with all my heart ‘Advance Mysore’” (The Mysore Patriot 1928). A local weekly also defended biw as it was helping “foster the industrial spirit of Mysore” and was “destined to play a noble part in the future of Mysore, only let it succeed, as it is bound to sometime...” (Vokkaligara Patrike 1929).

Phrases like “industrial bent”, “industrial spirit” and “industrial sense” in the preceding passages affirm the power of an abstract value which perceived obstacles to Mysore’s development to be cultural in nature. Important qualities indexed in those phrases were lacking in Mysoreans; industrialisation would bring about the necessary transformations in this respect. The purported gains become intelligible only through the lens of social evolutionist schemas of industrial progress. Phrases like “Advance Mysore” and “as it is bound to sometime” share a teleological conviction about the future direction of the iron plant and Mysore.

The Dynamic of Recognition

biw was an important symbolic asset for Mysore. Important state guests like Gandhi, P C Ray and J C Bose and many British officials were invited to visit biw. Official and popular books on the Mysore state unfailingly included photographs of the iron plant. At the annual state Dasara exhibition, which attracted more than five lakh visitors, the biw products were prominently displayed. Mysore also exhibited them at the Great Exhibition in London in 1924. Its official exhibition delegate wrote that the exhibition handbook had allotted 10 pages to the Mysore exhibits and asked Mysoreans to feel gratified that their state had been well represented in an international forum (Anonymous 1924: 430). Regrettting that visual illustrations did not accompany the handbook’s section on Mysore, as they would have provided persuasive evidence for Mysore’s progress, he attempted to convey a visual sense for the exhibits from the iron plant:

A complete collection of the products of the Mysore Iron Works, consisting of specimens of wood used, the charcoal produced, the pyroligneous liquors, the grey acetate of lime, wood alcohol, tar, floatation oils and other distillates, have been displayed. The superiority of the Mysore charcoal pig iron, which nearly approaches in quality the Swedish iron, is evident even to a casual glance of the bar shown, and some articles made from it have been displayed (ibid).

Even a casual glance of the displayed iron bar could prove its quality. Further, Mysore was second only to Sweden; it had fared well in the internationalised hierarchy of production standards. The Mysore state elite were clearly participants in the politics of civilisational recognition on the global stage, where hegemonic conceptions of unilinear progress classified countries as either modern or backward.

The colonial denial of recognition to the colonised societies was enacted in the presence of a global audience. Mysore’s initiatives towards achieving self-propelled progress, and thereby, proving the falsity of the colonial myths, were potentially open to evaluation by this imagined global audience that subscribed to a universal measure of progressive conduct. Testifying to this
As the state’s activities in Mysore were visible to the “outside world”, biw’s performance mattered for reasons other than the purely economic ones.

In 1924, the dewan had affirmed that the state would keep biw operational, despite the big losses, as it stood “to gain a reputation for firmness and courage in case the plant succeeds and pays its way...” (MIWSP 1924: 30). His letter to the ruler of Mysore also illustrates the dynamics of recognition: “We must make it (biw) a success. Failure is unthinkable...The reputation of His Highness and of the Mysore Government are at stake” (ibid: 102).

In 1927, biw was staffed completely by Mysoreans, a fact that was publicised across India. A Bombay newspaper carried a large headline: “Bhadravarti Iron Works – Completely Manned by Indians” (Bombay Chronicle 1927). Letters appeared in numerous newspapers demanding that a similar “Indianisation” of the workforce happen in other industrial concerns as that would prove Indians’ capacity in technical matters. The power of the politics of civilisational recognition is evident in Gandhi’s speech at biw in 1927:

(One) thing that strikes me is that the whole undertaking is from top to bottom a self-contained one. The originator is a Mysorean. The staff and labourers are mostly Mysoreans, at any rate entirely south Indian. That is a thing of which you and India may well be proud. You have given the lie made at some quarters that India has intellect but no practical genius (Gandhi [1927] 1980: 422).

Gandhi simultaneously affirmed the Indians’ capacity in science and technology and the falsity of the orientalist claims.

Conclusion
In 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s Independence Day speech noted, “India is on the road to progress. The whole world is watching us with expectation...We must have the self-confidence to realise that we are second to none, that Indians are as good as the best” (Singh 2005). The prime minister belongs in the long line of Indian elite caught in the drama of civilisational recognition scripted by the discourse of development. Alongside analysis, this paper has attempted to reveal the limitations of a style of thought enamoured of “development” and emphasised the need for reflexivity about the knowledge bases of states. In the games of recognition where the terms of engagement are set by development and capitalist modernity, there is no salvation for countries striving to catch up. The ethical necessity for states to opt out of this mode of engagement is as urgent as ever.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN CITATIONS

AOD: Address of the Dوانs of Mysore to the Dasara Representative Assembly at Mysore
DOB: Demi-Official Correspondence Relating to the Bhadravarti Iron Works, 1923-1925
MIWSP: Mysore Iron Works (Select Papers), 1921-1923
RPA: Report on the Progress of Agriculture in Mysore, 1926
SPMIS: Select Papers on the Mysore Iron Scheme, 1915-1922

NOTES

1. Scholars on developmental states have usually worked on north-east and south-east Asian societies. The impact of colonialism on the formation of developmental states has not found sufficient attention. The few studies that do examine this issue have done so from a formal institutionalist perspective (Kohli 2004; Lange 2005; Lange, Mahoney and vom Hau 2006).

2. Invocations of national self-identity in Mysore shifted across geopolitical referents. In late 19th and early 20th century, Mysoreans considered themselves a distinct national community and viewed non-Mysoreans as “foreigners” and “immigrants”. On occasion occasions, they also viewed themselves as Indian. In 1924, Krishnaraja Wadiyar, the ruler of Mysore declared: “We, in Mysore, form, as it were, a nation within a nation” (Wadiyar 1934: 231).

3. The Weberian concept of power underlies my definition of the state elite as consisting of those whose decisions could prevail over those of others. As such, it does not capture the complex phenomenological dimensions of the power exercised by the maharaja (and the dawans and civil servants) in Mysore.

4. List was a major influence on the state elite in post-restoration Japan (Cummings 1999: 61).

5. The word “development” surfaces in the Mysore elite’s vocabulary in the late 19th century. (“Improvement” was its conceptual predecessor in early and mid-19th century). “Progress”, another term in the Mysore elite lexicon, referred to a set of necessary results in the social, political and economic realms. Although the elite sometimes saw “development” as synonymous with “progress”, they usually used it in relation to the economy. Viewed as social in nature, the issues of caste and women’s interest did not surface in elite discussions of economic development. In 1918, the state decided to grant preferential allotment to “backward” and “depressed” castes in state employment and education. Although the subject of caste now intruded abstract discussions of economic development, the elite discussions often overlooked it.

6. M Visvesvarayya was the Dewan of Mysore between 1912 and 1918. He published Planned Economy for India (1936), the first book on Indian planning. He received the Bharat Ratna in 1955.

7. My use of the term “recognition” does not derive from Hegel’s philosophical anthropology of recognition. Hegel posits a non-voluntarist, relational theory of self-determination, where the individual pursuit of freedom was secured only within relations of mutual recognition with others (see Pippin 2000).

8. Benkipura, which means “fire town” in Kannada, was later renamed Bhadravati.

9. Perin proposed the manufacture of iron only and not steel as the latter needed a large capital outlay and required more charcoal than could be locally obtained (Perin 1946: 5).

10. In practice, the managing agent is usually responsible for the initial promotion, financing, underwriting, and organisation of the joint-stock company (Kling 1992: 83).

11. Between 1899 and 1927, the purity of the Indian rupee was set at one shining and four pence. In 1917, Rs 120 lakhs were worth 8,60,000 pounds.

12. Founded in 1907, the Mysore Legislative Council allowed legislative powers to the officials and non-officials nominated by the government.

13. Between 1899 and 1927, Rs 64 lakhs and Rs 141 lakhs equalled 4,26,000 and 7,60,000 pounds respectively.

14. Kemmangundi, the chief site of iron ore, was 26 miles to the south of Bhadravati. Mining labour was mostly recruited from within Mysore, with some were recruited from places like Salem and Malabar. Between 1921 and 1929, mining labourers averaged 373 persons per year (Sen 1933: 30). In 1925, 5,582 workers were working for the BIW (DOB 1924: 177). In 1941, this figure became...
10,000 (Rao 1942: 11). But most of them worked in the reserved forest to supply wood for the 12 retorts at BIW. Other than the retorts, the iron plant consisted of a charcoal blast furnace and a pig iron distillation plant for recovering the by-products from the wood burnt for producing charcoal.

15 These losses were commonly attributed to the wood for the blast furnace that was a major component of a charcoal blast furnace and a pig iron distillation plant for recovering the by-products from the wood burnt for producing charcoal.

16 For an elaborate discussion of the state’s deployment of the rhetoric of “expertise” in relation to BIW, see Gowda (2007).

17 Albion Banerji was Dewan of Mysore between 1926 and 1941.

18 M Visvesvarayya was invited by the state to take charge of managing the BIW in 1923.

19 Mirza Ismail was Dewan of Mysore between 1926 and 1941.

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**SPECIAL ARTICLE**


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