

**LISA MITCHELL. *HAILING THE STATE*. DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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Lisa Mitchell's *Hailing the state* is a detailed, sensitive account of both state-making and statehood, as it pertains to the secession of Telangana and (as she puts it) to the state of India more broadly. Mitchell thus explores how democracy is practised in her treatment of a repertoire of mechanisms including *dharna* (sit ins), *bandhs* (shutdown strikes), the *rail roko* (railway blockades), *rāstā roko* (road blocks), and many more; practices woven into the fabric of Teluguvāru and arguably Indian politics and democracy. Significantly, Mitchell emphasises that 'hailing the state' in this way is often the last recourse taken by citizens (37, 185-186) and that just because this vernacular exists within India, does not mean such methods *only* relate to hailing the state as they can also be employed against the state (194).

Hailing the state, perhaps echoing its subject matter, is split in two, with Part I tracing the genealogies of these methods of protest and their use in compelling an audience. Part II explores the distinctions made between the political and criminal act, as determined by the state, by examining multiple mechanisms of the repertoire Mitchell alludes to at the beginning of the book.

The importance of spatial realities when hailing the state is present from the very first chapter onwards. Mitchell begins by exploring the *dharna* (sit ins) and their literal and metaphorical place within Indian democracy. Many hailing practices are partially or temporarily accepted and are designated spaces within parks, municipal property, and public areas (50). However, *dharna* can also be manipulated, moved, and sequestered in parts of the city, such as the protest square of Dharna Chowk (47). Interweaving the contemporary retelling of Dharna Chowk with a historical understanding of the method, Mitchell demonstrates how *dharna* has always been used to provoke dialogue and negotiation with the state.

In Part II, chapters on practices including alarm chain pulling, rail and *rāstā roko*, and *yātra* (journeys or pilgrimages) demonstrate the centrality of modes of movement and their role in communicating political messages. Halting the primary means of communication for much of India necessarily reverberates the message along the track or path (167). These practices are also demarcated by their supposed political significance. Given bus services are controlled by the individual states, and railways by the central government, so too was political action often bifurcated (166). Similarly, ticketless travel, and the fluidity afforded to groups who are granted it, demonstrate an acceptance of their various grievances, which Mitchell terms 'political arrival' (203-204).

In this way, the spatial reality of mechanisms to 'hail the state' (29-35) grants insight into who may utilise a given method. Mobility being integral to an industrialised society, the

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meaning of actions relating to transportation is heavily contested. Thus, alarm chain pulling (halting trains) is variously considered vulgar (158) and legally permissible (156). Relatedly, the second chapter introduces the concept of communicative 'style' alongside the traditional expectation for leaders to hold audience in India; where collective action operated to communicate demands to authorities, rather than topple them (81). As with the spatial accommodations of *dharna*, so called 'Grievance Days' (70-72) institutionalise 'styles' of communication, allowing for a *perception* of listening, if not its actual practice, and granting states the possibility to inscribe what airing grievances should look like. Similarly, chapter four's focus on highly organised trans-local and trans-communal general strikes (136-138) demonstrates how the East India Company demonised or ignored all but their defined 'legitimate' forms of redress, and only recognised individual actors within mass assemblies, thereby dissipating the collectivity's power (144).

Chapters two and three examine Dalit students' decade-long remonstrations to the University of Hyderabad's chief warden of hostels and academic board, and their subsequent characterisation by the media and other figures of authority as 'angry' (75), or 'uncivil' (113). Yet with little other recourse, practices like alarm chain pulling force the state to respond to demands from marginalised voices owing to their outsized spatial effect. Civility is therefore not a neutral act, but the preserve of privileged groups; *'a product of structures of authority that facilitate the recognition of political subjects and give audience to their voices... [which, upon being recognised, provides] the luxury of appearing to be more civil'* (121, emphasis in original).

The demonisation of those threatening authority naturally leads to a final repression by the state to erase collective assembly: criminalisation. Broadly comprising Part II, the classification of actions as criminal or political is an important political distinction, changing according to factors such as socioeconomic status (192), convenience to the state (163), or the degree to which actions are institutionalised and thus deemed acceptable (183-185). Therefore, *who* articulates an action is more important than *what* the action may be when characterising the perpetrator as a criminal or political agent (212). Mitchell describes this in terms of defining '*publics*', where one group is ostensibly comprised of successful political agents, and the other of labourers, thugs, and hooligans, who are thought of as unruly (205-210). Yet Mitchell's close historical reading of alarm chain pulling demonstrates how widespread this democratic practice was, from British rule to today (160-164). As such, distinguishing '*publics*' is another attempt to erase collective action and outline so-called legitimate political actors. The truth, according to Mitchell, is that democracy is ongoing, between and at elections, and through a multitude of methods which aim to 'hail the state'.

Mitchell's monograph is comprehensively researched, immersive, and a fascinating insight into the practise of democracy within Telangana and India, extensively employing both archival data and contemporary ethnography. She simultaneously centres democratic or dialogic attempts to compel an audience with the state, whilst taking care to acknowledge literature and action from those, like anarchists, who view themselves as oppositional to it (15) or even oscillate between these two modes (193).

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