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Nationalism: Competing Ideologies and Contrasting Visions

Ideology and Indian Historiography

Karl Mannheim has pointed out that ideological representation can be considered either as 'false consciousness', 'a deception', and a 'conscious lie', or as the 'outlook inevitably associated with a given historical and social situation and the Weltanschauung and style of thought bound up with it'; and that in concrete situations, these two apparently polar aspects most often tend to 'coalesce' (K. Mannheim 1979: pp. 49ff.). In the context of Indian historiography this differential conception of ideology has provided the basic value-reference for divergent interpretations of the nationalist movement and thought. At one end of the spectrum, we have the nationalists for whom the ideology of nationalism was a great unifying force, an accurate reflection of the objective condition and contradiction—colonial exploitation—that was central to the corporate life of society at large. It was the Weltanschauung at first, of the emerging middle classes, but soon spread to the entire mass of people, welding them towards a corporate will to be a nation.[1] At the other end of the spectrum, however, we have the Cambridge scholars for whom the same nationalist ideology (indeed any ideology) was merely a

[1] The most articulate exponent of this point of view is Prof. Bipin Chandra. See particularly (1987).

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convenient label to hide what was essentially an unprincipled pursuit of economic and political advantage on the part of the different elite groups, in competition with each other, always in response to and essentially determined by the imperial initiatives. The anti-imperialist nationalism was a 'deception' and 'a conscious lie' as borne out by the middle classes' collaboration, and even collusion, with the colonial state at different levels.[2] These two polar positions based on exclusive conceptions of ideology are themselves obviously ideological and have been found too simplistic in either direction by most scholars.[3] The several intermediary positions apply, in various combinations of both the partial as well as the total conceptions of ideology, to Indian nationalism, and describe it as bourgeois, elite, and communal. As an expression and rationalization of the interests and aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the elite or of the majority religious community, nationalism of the subcontinent, was certainly a false representation in this view. However in its basically anti-imperialist character, it was a true reflection of the objective contradiction between the society as a whole and imperialism. Thus taken together, though imperfect, limited, ambiguous or derivative, Indian nationalism, at least in its later stages, was indeed genuinely national.[4]

Historiography has hitherto highlighted the differences between these various readings of the nationalist ideology and also claimed that these represent the multiple and contesting power positions within society.[5] But for our purpose, it is pertinent to unravel the basic similarities and value assumptions that underlie these polar as well as inter-polar ideological positions. Despite real and serious

[2] While 'Cambridge Scholars' is certainly no monolith, devaluation of ideology as a motor force in history is characteristic of all of them; for a strident formulation of this point of view see D. Washbrook, particularly his earlier writings (1976) and with C.J. Baker (1976).

[3] Nationalist extremism has been met time and again by the Marxist, Subaltern and Cambridge historians; for a criticism of the latter, see R.E. Frykenberg (1978), T. Raychaudhuri (1973), H. Spodak (1979) and other reviews; within the country, see M.S.S. Pandian (1995). Washbrook himself appears to have shifted from his earlier position in his later writings; see for example his (1982).

[4] See A.R. Desai (1948) and recently S. Sarkar (1983).

[5] J. Chaturvedi (1990) would be one such attempt.

differences especially between the nationalist and Cambridge scholars, all these historiographical constructions are erected and maintained on certain formal premises, essentialized categories, and conceptual monoliths. The millenia-old dominance of the upper castes in the pre-modern era, their politically successful articulation of the nationalist ideology during the colonial period, their subsequent near-monopolistic assumption of power within both the civil and political societies to the exclusion of the mass of lower castes, Muslims and tribals in independent India, have helped in the historiographical construction, sociological elaboration and political maintenance of a complex nationalist mythical lore, as a master-narrative, of the nation's becoming. Such a lore woven around the now worn out categories of communalism, nationalism and imperialism informs, of course in a differential manner, the different historiographical schools.[6] Parallel to the lines of contestation among themselves in interpreting the details of history, there also runs a not too thin line of consensus on the basics of nationalist ideology in the Indian context. This agreed-upon nationalist myth has hitherto successfully managed to project the formation of a somewhat homogenized quasi-class from among the scattered, traditionally dominant communities, as the emergence of the nation. In other words, the application of the Mannheimian distinction between the conscious lie and Weltanschauung of the age by modern Indian historiographies is somewhat superficial. Underlying such a distinction is a vast area of non-distinction or consensus that is definitely related to the identity of the societal power-position they speak from, *vis-à-vis* the culturally scattered and presumably inarticulate masses.

The nationalist mythical core that underlies all schools of hitherto elaborated historiographies can be deconstructed into a set of

[6] The Subaltern historiographers, to the extent that they have pointed out the existence of other voices, divergent in trajectory from that of the elite leadership, and have recognized the non-emergence of the nation, indeed represent a breakthrough. But beyond this, they too share with the rest all the other major propositions enumerated below; working within an extremely narrow data-base, worn-out conceptions of nation and nationalism (as anti-Britishism) and refusing to recognize the culture-specific power configuration within society. They have largely failed to interpret the subaltern voices in the field.

propositions, concerning political awakening in general and nationalism in particular, as follows: Political awakening in the subcontinent was a late phenomenon of the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century. Until the Gandhian phase, political activity was limited to the elites of various description and the masses in general were apathetic and even dormant. Politics itself meant only that articulation and activity which was addressed to, preferably against, the colonial state. Nationalism, in both form and substance, came from the West and was expressed through the sole channel of the middle classes. Outside of these groups, there was no nationalism. Nationalism in colonial countries is considered to be a special category and in the context of the subcontinent is to be understood only as pan-Indianism and anti—imperialism. Sections other than the middle classes, i.e. the lower castes, Muslim masses and tribals, came to participate in public life at the instance of the divide and rule policy of the British. The somewhat unauthorized and autonomous assertions of these other sections, being neither pan-Indian nor anti-imperialist in form, were not national but its polar opposite—communal whether religious, casteist, ethnic, linguistic or whatever. Imperialism, embodying a well-rounded value system, was another polar opposite of nationalism and hence, of those who chose to call themselves nationalists. The nationalists, the sole articulators of nationalist ideology in the subcontinent, stood equidistant from communalism and imperialism; that any challenge to the nationalism of the middle classes was inspired either by communal or imperialist ideas (the latter being Eurocentric). The Gandhian genius and subsequent political mobilization eventually neutralized all but one form of communalism, brought the masses under the true nationalist hegemony and defeated imperialism. This is the myth at the core of Indian nationalism. This way of representing political awakening and nationalism common to all forms of historiography, if not perceivable as a 'conscious lie', was certainly not the Weltanschauung of the age, and this sameness of perspective is related to the identity of the social position they all speak from.

The application in the earlier chapters, of the recent developments in the sociology of nation and nationalism, as elaborated in our theoretical paradigm of double congruence between culture and power, lead us through the historical landscape, to areas not usually

recognized as the national. Even a cursory survey revealed that the masses were in no way apathetic or dormant and there was in fact a reslessness all over the subcontinent. It also revealed the fact that political consciousness arose much earlier, was more widespread, and political activities manifested themselves in multiple and contesting ways. Nationalism itself was neither a monolith nor was nationalist ideology the monopoly of the dominant communities.

Outright denial of all these and other facts or de-legitimization of them by branding them casteist, communalist, regionalist etc., is crucial for the elite articulations of nationalism in the subcontinent to be considered the 'Weltanschauung of the age'. To understand however, the real import of the elite nationalist ideology, it is vital to contextualize it within the realm of plural and conflicting political awakenings and articulations in colonial India. The Weltanschauung of the age might then appear as more the Weltanschauung of an inchoate, emerging coalition of ruling groups, and certainly not that of a nation.

This chapter is therefore intended to analyse and delineate the multiple and contending ways in which nationalist ideology was articulated and the nation imagined.

Nationalism as an Ideology

Theorizing on nation, nationality and nationalism in general has proceeded rather exclusively along either the subjective or the objective factors that constitute such phenomena. Nations are presumed to have certain objective characteristics such as language, race, religion, territory or history which either singly or in combination distinguish them from other nations. Protection and promotion of these, in competition and conflict with other nations, then becomes nationalism. Alternatively, nations are considered as collectivities built on the subjective consciousness of identity of kind, commonality of interests, and a will to be a nation. Here political assertion and actualization of such a consciousness or will becomes nationalism. On the basis of such divergent theoretical orientations, nationalisms have been classified as cultural or political respectively. Most scholars see Western nationalisms as political and the Eastern ones

as cultural. The alternate classification of the nineteenth century nationalisms as political and the twentieth century ones as cultural, alters the above geographical, dichotomy only marginally. Outright moral evaluation of nationalisms is also noticeable; Western nationalisms are considered genuine, progressive and secular while those of the East, are imitative, conservative and primordial. This is so because, we are told, nationalism is a doctrine invented in the West and subsequently transported to the rest. The terms East and West, originally applied to intra-Europe differences were later transferred to the halves of the globe.[7]

Taking a cue from Gellner, however, our own approach has been to describe the nationalist phenomena as the double congruence between culture and power—a combination of both the streams of theorizing—the process of homogenization of power within culture as the transition to nation, the transference of power from without, i.e., the assertion of distinction and the demand for self-determination—as the nationalist movement and the congruence between the two processes as nationalism (see chapter I). Such a theoretical elaboration assumes variability of both actualization and occurrence of contestation at every level of nationalism in concrete historical circumstances. Nationalism as a form and manifestation of modern politics is about groups in conflict for power—social, political, and economic—and as an ideology it is always articulated in the context of multiple ideologies (G. Therbon 1980: pp. 41ff.). Excluding therefore, those that stand explicitly for non-congruence of culture and power, all ideologies indeed have nationalistic implications or dimensions variably expressed, whether or not they label themselves as such. What we are suggesting is that nationalism as a modern ideology can never be a monolith within particular cultures; instead, it is always pluralistic and contestingly articulated. Nationalist political awakening, i.e., political awakening that aspires to a new culture-power congruence, is basically a contestation among social and economic groups as to how the congruence is to take place. While the contestation between forces opposing and

[7] See the earlier references to nationalism in chapter I, particularly those of H. Kohn (1965), K.R. Minogue (1969), and L.L. Snyder (1954).

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those supporting congruence under colonial circumstances tends to be exaggerated, the primary contest however remains within culture in the realm of how the nation is to be constituted. The external struggle, its form, duration, nature, and intensity are not unrelated to the basic internal struggle. In this sense, it is poor theorizing, firstly, to club together pre-modern quasi-national movements with modern nationalism and describe all of them as manifestations of primordialism; and secondly, to describe in monolith fashion modern nationalisms of particular geographic regions, or epochs of history, as either cultural or political. It is also inaccurate to set up an entirely new category called colonial nationalism as a sub-monolith outside the general theoretical framework. The variable and contesting nature of modern nationalist ideologies had been pointed out by Carlton Hayes, who found that the so-called political nationalisms of the West, from a different perspective and at certain phases, presented themselves as cultural, and that cultural-national chauvinisms are certainly related to their own internal struggle for power-distribution.[8]

'Nationalism is a doctrine invented in the West' asserted Khaddourie. Scholars before and after him have taken this for granted, and within the subcontinent too, this is being repeated ad nauseam, both in and out of context. What however this scholarly insight of apparent consensus ignores is the crucial distinction between form and substance in nationalism. If by nationalism is meant the style of thought, its terminology, its formulation including the historically specific form of the nation-state with all its formal paraphernalia, then it was developed in the West. If however nationalism means the coming together of culture and power, a kind of social and societal change in which ascription is challenged and the social power balance in general is tilted towards the hitherto excluded masses within culture, and also an aspiration of cultures for recognition and self-determination then nationalism is neither an invention of the West nor its monopoly domain. Complex agrarian cultures everywhere, to a greater or lesser degree, within their own space and time specificities have expressed both these tendencies of cultural assertion and power homogenization

[8] C. Hayes (1931) notes the simultaneity of waning of liberalism with the waxing of nationalism, p. 163 ff.

in several spheres of formal life. The emergence, for example of cultural wholes—speech communities—containing the whole range of social classes, is an accommodation of the egalitarian aspiration of the labouring masses as well as an assertion of collective identity. The substantial issues of contestation in the context of modern nationalisms in all societies are therefore internal to their own specific form of development. These are to be traced to their individual histories, in order to grasp what finally determined the nature and outcome of the nationalist struggles as well as to predict their future course. The form and the idiom were certainly borrowed, but primarily to express and resolve the historical dialectic of each society. The determinative power of the imported ideological forms and styles however, is not to be overrated particularly when the culture concerned has a long and continuous history. Viewed from these somewhat tentative theoretical perspectives, the nationalist articulations of colonial India appear to have the following characteristics: One, a rather low level of articulation throughout the entire period under discussion; it is noteworthy that not a single ideologue of stature, not to speak of consensus, emerged in India. Instead, ideology was articulated piecemeal, often shifting positions over time, thus creating enormous scope for multiple and even contradictory interpretations later. Two, nationalist ideas and forms were appropriated and articulated here, not in imitation but primarily to express local concerns which were in continuity with the history of the subcontinent. Several studies have highlighted the fact that the Indian freedom movement drew its inspiration from one or another of the European revolutions—the French, the American, the English, the Italian, the German, the Irish, the Turkish and the Russian, as well as, from the Fascist and Nazi ideologies. However, the Indian movement cannot be understood in terms of any one or more of these; ideas were certainly borrowed but they were modified and transformed to express substantial issues peculiar to the subcontinent. It is the historical development and the modern historical context that would provide a meaningful explanation of Indian nationalism, not the ideas that are presumed to have come from the West.[9] Three, following in a broad sense the long historical dialectics

[9] See F. Giueseppe (1993), P. Heehs (1984), K. Kaushik (1984), M. Sadig (1983) and H. Brasted (1980). S.N. Banerjee (1925) described the situation

of the pre-modern era, the polarization process during the colonial period that tended to aggravate pre-existing social cleavages and the subsequent pluralist political awakening, it could be said that nationalist ideology in the subcontinent was articulated initially trichotomously and eventually settled down to a contentious dichotomy. The forms of nationalism described below are distinguished on the basis of the predominance of particular aspects of nationalism rather than exclusive characters. The trichotomy comprised the political nationalism of the lower caste masses, the ethnic and linguistic nationalism of the tribals and regional culture-groups, and finally the cultural nationalism of an emerging pan-Indian upper caste/class elite (C. Heimsath 1964: pp. 132ff.).

While it was freely accepted that India was composed of several nations and nationalities in the rather general sense of culture-groups, castes, communities, tribes and linguistic groups, neither the British nor the emerging pan-Indian elite was willing to see the subcontinent as consisting of distinct, identifiable and territorially contiguous ethnic and linguistic nations such as in Europe, for example. For the British, an admission of similarity with Europe would mean granting of equality to the East as the other. Their actions—piecemeal conquest, the organization of large port-centered presidencies and the erection of uniform administration—contributed much to the denial and disruption of the orderly, though unevenly developing ethnic diversity. This imperial perception and practice suited the emerging dominant-Sanskritic elite group too, as they dreamed of transforming themselves into the pan-Indian successor to the British. Within these multilevel constraints ethnic and linguistic ideology could express itself only marginally and indirectly. The tribal groups, wherever territorially contiguous, did articulate such an ideology. However, these articulations were in general late in being heard, and marginal to the overall socio-political dynamic of the subcontinent. The port-presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras too were not free of ethnic and linguistic nationalisms; the ascendancy of the Tamil Brahmin groups in Madras created ethnic

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accurately enough: 'I lectured upon Mazzini but took care to tell the young men to abjure his revolutionary ideas', p. 40.

nationalist reverberations among the Malayalis, Kannadigas and the Telugus. In Bombay and Bengal many of the so-called pan-Indian ideologies could be better understood as Maharashtrian and Bengali national aspirations and these too generated reactions in the Gujarati, Oriya, Bihari, and Assamese areas.[10] However these forms of political awakening and national articulation could not, during the colonial period, spread or sustain themselves in the face of the overarching political discourse of the imperialist-nationalist continuum which was pan-Indian in both structure and ideology. In other words, the overwhelming and pan-Indian horizontal cleavage that developed as a result of colonialism, an interactive process first of both collaboration and then of confrontation between two sets of elite, largely and at least for the time being, overshadowed the historical agenda of diverse ethnic groups and left the field open for the two main contestants—the political and cultural nationalisms both articulated at the pan-Indian level.

Cultural Nationalism

The articulation of cultural nationalism revolves around first, the beliefs concerning the distinctness, integrity, uniqueness and superiority of one's culture and second, the claim that such a culture is the proper and legitimate repository of collective and determinative power. The culture is named and identified, its contours delineated and lineage traced, its rise and fall in history noted and potential threats to it identified. Then this sanctified culture, with its internal power-configuration, is projected as the normative model for the present and future nation. Finally, the demand is raised that collective power congrue with this 'national' culture. Cultural-nationalist articulation is thus a process that sets forth the nation as an ideological-cultural construct. The complex process of selection, rejection, modification and codification of a normative national culture from amorphous pre-modern traditions does not take place in a vacuum.

[10] For the rise of ethnic and regional consciousness in different areas, see S. Chandra (1982a) and (1992), M.J. Koshy (1972), N.K. Arooran (1980), S. Banerjee (1992). C. Heimsath (1964), ch.VI etc.

Nations and nationalisms, not only as forms of transition from one kind of society to another, but also as ideological-cultural constructs, need to be situated within one and the same socio-historical context and understood both as a continuity and a break in history. In other words, the nation as an imagined community or as a nationalist invention cannot be detached from politico-economic transitions and understood solely in terms of either modernity or pre-modernity.

Beliefs concerning what the nation is or ought to be, in terms of either culture or power, in the subcontinent began to be pieced together during the early colonial period. Apart from the politico-economic or structural context delineated in the earlier chapters, certain aspects of the ideological context for the articulations of nationalism need to be pointed out here. The first is the set of beliefs and articulations of the British concerning the subcontinent's society and culture. The numerous ways in which 'they' represented India provided the ideological environ within which the nationalist self-perception took shape. The second is the set of beliefs and articulations again of the British, concerning their own national society and culture, i.e., the ideal nation; the number of ideological premises, often implicit, that underlay the new juridico-administrative infrastructure also provided the environ within which the self-perception of the nation took shape. These two sets of beliefs held by the colonial bureaucracy are advisedly characterized as the context or environ, and not the determinants of nationalist ideology.[11] For as we have repeatedly pointed out, it is the substantial issues internal to the subcontinent's history that ultimately determined the social power-configuration within the nation, albeit in the modern ideological idiom and structural context.

The process of piecing together the cultural nation began during the last quarter of the eighteenth century with the orientalist project in Bengal. It spread subsequently among the emerging middle classes in all the important regions, the process continuing till the end of

[11] Nation as a cultural construct needs to be contextualized within the nation as socio-political change. Therefore R. Inden's orientalist thesis (1986, 1990) would be incomplete if not seen in the context of actual re-hierarchicalization of society during the colonial period and if orientalism itself is not recognized as a collaborated venture of two power groups.

the colonial period. The historical cultural discoveries of the early orientalists, working in and around Fort William, Calcutta, regarding the Aryan myth, the Sanskrit language, and the sacred texts, laid the foundation for all subsequent cultural, nationalist articulations in the subcontinent. While the precise formulation of the ideology is to be traced to Orientalism, the project itself needs to be understood as a process and product of a collaboration and coincidence between two sets of sources—imperialist and native.[12] Evidence is not lacking to show that cultural pride in the subcontinent pre-dated colonialism and it occurred simultaneously in several regions as a reflection of the social power-position of the articulating groups.[13] Cultural nationalism here, then, is both a break with, as well as a continuity in history. The first significant aspect of this cultural, nationalist ideology was this: ever since the late eighteenth century the cultural core of the nation-to-be, though variously named as the Aryan, Indo-Aryan, Sanskritic, Sanatan, caste-Hindu, Hindu or even Indian, came to be identified with the Sanskritic, textual traditions of Vedic, Brahminism. Civilization itself was supposed to have dawned on this subcontinent with the advent of the Indo-Aryans who were a branch of the master Nordic races of the Northern hemisphere. The two branches of the Aryan stock were non-problematically identified with the present day Brahminic upper castes and the British rulers. Sanskrit, the sister language of Greek, through the Dharmic texts is presumed to have preserved the cultural heritage of the nation and to be the root of all subsequent vernaculars, in terms of both language and culture. The cultural-spiritual soul of the nation to be born was thus identified and baptized. The second aspect was that the territorial spread of this cultural core was supposed to be co-extensive with the subcontinent itself, though again differentially

[12] See R. Schwab (1984); L. Paliakov (1974); P.J. Marshall (ed.) (1970); J. Leopold (1970); R. Thapar (1975); C. Jeffrelot (1995) and D. Kopf (1969). Vivekananda went to the extent of seriously considering Max Muller as a reincarnation of Sankaracharya himself: 'My impression is that it is Sayana who is born again as Max Muller to revive his own commentary on the Vedas. I have had this notion for long. It became confirmed in my mind, it seems after I had seen Max Muller'. Vivekananda (1965) vol VI p. 495.

[13] See for example Sachau, E.C. (ed) (1914) *Alberuni's India* pp. 22 ff.

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named the Aryavart, Bharatvarsh, Hindustan, British Empire, colonial state or even India. Vedic Brahminism, through religio-cultural symbolism and a consensus value system, was supposed to have given unity and integrity although in an uneven manner to the entire spread of the subcontinent. The apparent contradiction between cultural minimalism—Vedic Brahminism—as the nation and the territorial maximalism—pan-Indian spread—as the state was sought to be resolved through the mediation of the popular yet nebulous concept of Hindu/Hinduism/Hindustan. Through this conceptual spectrum, understood either in religio-cultural or in territorial terms, Vedic Brahminism as an ideology re-engulfed the subcontinent now transformed into the colonial state, thus creating a pan-Indian religio-cultural nationalism on the models of pre-modern Islam and Christianity. The third aspect was that the values and principles of the social organization of this cultural nation were to be derived and defined through a presumed polar opposition to those of the West, Europe, and British imperialism or simply modernity. If the West was materialist, we were spiritual, if individualist, then we were corporate, if competitive and conflictual then our culture was organic and harmonious. And finally, perhaps the most decisive presumption was that, if western society was based on uniform rights for individuals, then Eastern society was organized around differential duties for naturally ordained, stratified groups. Indeed this hierarchical Varna-based ordering of groups with presumed natural tendencies and aptitudes was hailed as the great national-social synthesis effected by the so-called Aryan genius that contained the core of the continuity from the past, through the present, to the future of the cultural nation. This national-proper, conceptualized differentially as societal synthesis, social economy, Hindu genius, national legacy etc. was not only considered the appropriate foundation to build the nation on, but also the great Indian message to the strife-ridden modern world. The ideology then called upon the nation to recognize its uniqueness in these (above) terms, to feel collective, cultural pride in its heritage, and to unite and oppose everything that threatened its continuance, regeneration and reassertion in modern times.

These three dimensions of cultural nationalist ideology; Vedic Brahminism as the cultural core, a pan-Indian territorial extent, and an antagonistic polarity with the West/modernity—became the

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sacred tenets of the new civil religion and informed all further elaborations and controversies. Together they formed a single perspective for the middle class, nationalist movement to view the past, present, and future of the nation in the making. They were also used as a touchstone to test the nationalness or otherwise of persons, movements and ideologies, and they determined the boundary line of exclusion from, and inclusion within, the sacred precincts of the nation that was seen, in Anderson's words, 'to be arising from its hoary past to loom large over the present and to extend into the future'.

Apart from the collaborative nature of the process, particularly the deep commitment and contribution of imperialist and orientalist scholarship, through which cultural nationalism in the subcontinent was constructed, what strikes one is the rapid and steady emergence of consensus approaching unanimity concerning the cultural nation, among the linguistically and regionally scattered, dominant upper castes, who were turning into a pan-Indian middle class. The history of this consensus did have stages, was not always linear and was even contested at times. Initially, controversy raged between the orthodox and the heterodox sections around socio-religious issues. The debate then became political and bifurcated between the Moderates and the Extremists; parallel to these was the disagreement over the precedence of political over social reform or vice-versa. If Bengal's approach to these problems was in general romantic and ideological, Bombay's was pragmatic and action-oriented. At the turn of the century however, as the nationalist movement surged ahead particularly in Bengal, reformism gave way to revivalism which was appropriately re-christened and seen as 'reform along national lines'. Discontentment, however, over the insufficiency of national reform and/or the excessively partisan way in which the cultural nation was defined, did surface time and again within the movement itself. Surely a repeat performance of the past, pure and simple, was not the agenda. The inchoate groups, through their differential formulations of tradition, did stand for some sort of reform and were anxious to absorb what they perceived to be the strong aspects of Western culture, and to that extent were willing to adjust their own culture. Having said this, however, it must be pointed out that the entire range of issues, controversies and debates within the emerging groups was largely peripheral to wider society, particularly in the

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concrete historical context, which was overcast with much more radical disputation.

Reform or change in the colonial context was looked upon by the native dominant groups either offensively or defensively as moves initiated and abetted by the foreign rulers and not as a demand of the historical dynamics of the subcontinent itself. A progressive stance *vis-á-vis* specific issues was only too easily maintained within a perfectly conservative frame of mind and often enough this vanished quickly when put to the test or was forced to extend to other issues. Taking sides on such issues did not lead to the development of a consistent and distinct attitudinal or ideological viewpoint on overall social and societal relations. The realm of reform and thus controversy, lay well outside the cultural nation in which consensus reigned supreme, and therefore there was no compact imaginable with those who challenged the cultural nation itself in the name of reform. Under such circumstances, it was not the differences, debates, controversies or rivalries among the middle classes but the underlying consensus, explicit or implicit concerning the basic premises of the cultural nation, that came to play a crucially determinative role in the realm of politics and ideology. The silent as well as not-so-silent consensus among the middle classes concerning the three dimensions of the cultural-nationalist ideology as the ideological minimum, and its socio-political implications, permeated the whole range of their modern intellectual activities laying the foundation for the emergence of a civil society specific to the subcontinent. Whether it was the early period in which ideological articulation was the exclusive privilege of the educated of the presidential towns, or the period of transition, when attempts were made with limited success to rope in the rural elite, or the later period in which mass activity finally emerged under Gandhian leadership; at no point of time was the cultural minimum of the nation-to-be challenged from within the movement itself. Across regions too, the same consensus came to mark the political awakening of the upper castes in Bengal, Bombay, Madras and subsequently other areas. This similarity across regions needs to be explained not only in terms of the overpowering imperialist tutelage, but also as a reflection of the identity of the power position these groups occupied within society. Whether it was the progressive Raja Ram Mohan Roy, or the conservative Deb

Kant, the moderate Justice Ranade or the extremist Tilak, the fractious groups of the Acharyas or the Ayengars of the south; whether the new civil religion was seen as distinct from the traditional one as by Naoroji and Mehta or as identical as by Aurobindo and Vivekananda; whether Hindu culture was interpreted in a geographical sense as by Savarkar or in a religio-cultural sense as by Gandhi; and whether the ideologies operated formally from within the Indian National Congress as a political body or chose to have their own distinct and at times even antagonistic political platforms such as a liberal party, socialist party or communist party, or socio-cultural forums such as Hindu Maha Sabha etc, these differences did not affect the essential understanding shared by them all. They all understood what was at stake, what needed to be strengthened and what ought to be fought against.[14]

Articulations concerning the cultural nation-to-be were not limited to those within the narrow realm of formal politics, but extended to all in the different areas of public life that eventually came to constitute civil society in the subcontinent; this included journalistic proliferations, literary imaginations and academic paradigms. While not many critical studies have been forthcoming on journalism during the colonial period, sufficient evidence can be gleaned from the available research to establish that powerful newspapers and journals such as *Tribune, Bengalee, Indian Mirror, Calcutta Review, Bengal Magazine, Hindu Excelsior Magazine, The Arya, National Magazine, The Theosophist, Young India, Harijan, Kesari, Sudharak, Vande Mataram, Hindu, Patriot, Bengal Hurkaru, Jugantar, Amrita Bazar Patrika, The Hindu* etc. played a crucial role in the definition and description of the cultural nation. The impact of these newspapers was generally uneven; some of them explicitly identified themselves with particular groups within the Indian National Congress, others were

[14] Such a minimum denominator underlies all the writings of the cultural nationalists of the colonial period: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim C. Chatterjee, R.C. Dutt, Pal, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tilak, Lala, Ranade, Motilal Nehru and later Gandhi, and a host of lesser writers. See their writings listed in the bibliography. Gokhale also appears not to be free of this, see S. Chandra (1992) pp. 126. Some like S.N. Banerjee started out differently, yet soon ended up acquiescing with the rest, see his (1925) pp. 367 ff; also G. Omvedt (1976) p. 113.

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outside of it but aligned with the nationalist movement in general. Yet others made efforts to clearly stand apart from the political movement as such and give a non-partisan and professional approach to contemporary issues. While the circulation figures of these journals, even taken together, might not have amounted to much in terms of absolute numbers, they did reach out to a pan-Indian readership among the educated.[15]

The content of these mass cultural organs could be simply described as colonial controversies of all kinds that affected the larger society: reform of religion, culture and tradition, state policy—what they are, should, and should not be, societal contours and construction, actual and ideal; threats to culture and tradition both from within and without etc. Controversies grew around every single socio-cultural issue often instanced by the colonial state; sides were taken and changed, alliances made and broken by individuals and groups, charges were traded and labels stamped on rivals and opponents. However, these contending cultural literary groups, working in and through the various controversies and negotiating continually for an advantageous stance *vis-à-vis* the colonial state through the pages of nearly a century old subcontinental journalism, consciously and/or unconsciously helped construct a consensus among themselves with regard to the site of contestation along with a code of conduct for the same. The overarching moral and ethical tone in which the proponents and opponents argued the issues brought them together towards an accepted ideal of the future cultural nation. Though identified and projected as Hindu, Hinduism and Hindustan, such an ideal was in fact an eclectic construction of Vedic Brahminism in its polar opposition to the West/modernity, was recognized, and was accepted not only by the wrangling groups but also by those contemporaries articulating from outside the movement. Textual Vedic sanction was sought by all the groups either for acceptance or rejection, or for modification of custom or tradition. The Vedic Varna ideal, as the representative of a harmonious society

[15] For general information on journalism during the colonial period, see R. Parthasarathy (1989), and S. Natarajan (1962), and for critical information B.T. Mc Cully (1966), S. R. Mehrotra (1971), and S. Chandra (1986, 1586a, 1992).

structured on the basis of differential duties as religious dharma, against the 'promiscuous', egalitarian rights of the secularized West, was the consensual aspiration of these groups. Vedic—Sanskritism came to be looked upon as the sacred cultural legacy of the subcontinent paralleling the role of Islamic or Christian traditions elsewhere in the world.

A similar process of consensus and construction around the cultural nation could be identified among the pioneering literati of the colonial period. The role of novelists and those generating other narratives in imaginative constructions of the national community is being increasingly recognized in social science literature concerning nationalism, thanks largely to Ben Anderson's path breaking book. The subcontinent too has had its share of cultural imaginations of the national community in several of its languages, beginning with the second half of the nineteenth century when prose narrative came into vogue, often imitating that of the western languages. Linguistic and literary renaissance in the subcontinent, like everything else here, has been uneven and took, at least initially, multiple directions. The representations in different languages had a differential determinative impact on the thought and behaviour pattern of society at large. However, underlying this amazing variety and unevenness, it is possible to discover substantial consensus on the ideal, at least among the more influential writers in the major Indian languages. Beginning with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and later R.C. Dutt in Bengal, including the pioneers of Hindi fiction—Pratap Narain Misra, Harishchandra Govardhanram, Balkrishna Bhatt, Radhacharan, Kishorilal, Devakinandan Khatri, Gangaprasad Gupta, Durgaprasad, Premchand, Maharashtrians like Harinarain Apte, as well as the Brahmin Tamil novelist Subramaniam and others, the writers of the times either created an imaginary world of consonance with Vedic Dharma or critiqued an actual world of dissonance from it in their work. Their 'voyages of nostalgia' into space and time, with a sense of historic and ethical destiny, invariably tended to strike home where dominant dharma or the traditional social values would be approved and upheld. In their view, the cultural-nationalist ideology comprised mainstream traditional values. Some of them did not grasp the full implications of such a conception, while others were perturbed by it. Yet others were at times severely critical

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of the nationalist movement which, through its praxis, was carrying forward the sectarian, cultural ideology to its logical conclusion. But with challenges mounting from both within and without, they implicitly or explicitly closed ranks and this helped reinforce the same cultural nationalist ideology.[16]

The cultural-nationalist ideology of the political movement was the dominant and determining inspiration behind the birth and development of modern historiographical and social science paradigms in the subcontinent. The three dimensions of cultural nationalism, Vedic Brahminism, a pan-Indian territory and an antagonism to modernity became the basic value orientations upon which the objectivity of modern Indian social science was sought to be established in both its theoretical and empirical aspects. Sanskritic Vedic texts were the source and foundation for a disciplinary diversification. The texts were treated as the main source of information and knowledge in an understanding of how the subcontinent's society was/is constituted, and thus how it ought to be constituted in the future. The unity of the subcontinent was sought to be demonstrated in several ways ranging from the implicit and non-problematic acceptance of it, to the explicit partisan construction of it, using Sanskritic texts. The unity—geographical, political and religio-cultural—of the subcontinent, woven around the symbols, myths and values of the sacred texts, was supposed to have existed both objectively and subjectively from time immemorial, though in the face of contemporary divisions and conflicts it was conceded that the nation was in the making. This primordial unity now took the shape of a supreme and overarching value framework for studies and investigations.

The multiple religio-cultural traditions of the subcontinent were now seen as part of a single coherent religion—Hinduism—which was emerging with all the regular trappings of organized religions such as Islam and Christianity. The intellegentsia, both within and without the political movement, repeatedly felt compelled to define the Hindu person and the content of Hinduism. Their definition

[16] The basic reading for the cultural imaginings of the narrativists are M. Mukherjee (1994), S. Chandra (1982, 1982a, 1986, 1986a and 1992), S.R. Bald (1982), G. Pandey (1984), and T. Sarkar (1987, 1994). The felicitous phrase 'voyages of nostalgia' is borrowed from M. Mukherjee (1994) p. 63.

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invariably revolved around Vedic Brahminic ideals, icons and codes of behaviour as representated in the Dharmashastras. The culture of the subcontinent was defined and described as Hindu culture and Hindu civilization, and in explicitly political contexts, as Indian culture and civilization.[17]

A value system, different from that of Great Britain, Europe or the West, was supposed to be embodied in this newly constructed Vedic Hindu-Indian culture, and much effort was mobilized in delineating and elaborating it in the different intellectual spheres—art, architecture, society, culture, philosophy, religion, and the sciences. Such a painstaking construction of real and supposed differences between a monolithic East and an equally monolithic West, and the creation of two irreconcilable and antagonistic cultural wholes, yet again drew its substance from the Vedic content of the Dharmashastras. And this East-West polarity became another value orientation in and through the writings of a whole spectrum of pioneering social, sociological and historiographical thinkers and writers—Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Radhakrishnan and scores of other lesser luminaries such as R.L. Mitra, R.C. Dutt, J.N. Sarkar, M.C. Ranade, Nila Kanta Shastri, R.C. Majumdar, K.K. Dutta, R.K. Mukherjee, C.P. Ramaswami Ayyar—who continually constructed and conjured up conceptual wholes such as India, Hinduism, culture, civilization, etc. in historical and normative categories. Thus the triple dimension of the cultural-nationalist ideology

[17] In place of nation and nationalism, the single most important theme for discussion during the colonial period by the cultural nationalists was Hindu and Hinduism. Practically every one of them was constrained to raise the question, who is a Hindu, and what is Hinduism, and to answer the same in terms of acceptance of the Vedas and other Dharmashastras and the ideals presumed to inform them, most importantly of differential duties to people with differential tendencies, meaning, of course, some form of Varna ideology. By repeatedly defining, describing and debating this twin question, the cultural nationalists indeed created the modern political Hindu and Hinduism and thought these to be the indigenous equivalents for nation and nationalism. See the writings of cultural nationalists listed in the bibliography. Parallel to Hindu and Hinduism, was also constructed 'Hindi' again through a series of exclusions, see K. Kumar (1991, 1993) and M. Mukherjee (1994) pp. 60–61.

of the political movement transformed itself into the universal intellectual and scientific paradigm of the age itself.[18]

The articulation of cultural nationalism in the subcontinent, approximately during the hundred years preceding the transfer of power in 1947, by almost solely the Brahminic, upper and dominant castes, in precisely the way depicted above, did not exhaust or extinguish several other, even antagonistic articulations, within the emerging class-like formation. The important ones among these have been identified as socialist and economic-liberal nationalist aspirations. The socialist variety of nationalism came to the subcontinent belatedly, after the success of Russian Revolution in 1917, as either socialism or communism. It began to exert some influence only in the 1920s by which time the basic contours of cultural nationalism were already drawn and consensus had been reached. Here, the deviation was with respect to the political and social implications of the dominant cultural-nationalist ideology in the realm of formal politics, and not about the basic tenets themselves. The articulators of socialist-nationalist aspirations, either within or without the mainstream nationalist movement, were not differentiated from others, in either socio-cultural or economic background. The socialist-nationalist articulation did not engender any new form of compact with the larger masses but by and large continued as another variety of the same elite articulation, albeit organizing to some extent the peasantry and the workers. The same could be said of economic—liberalism though this had a much longer history. The political movement which started during the last quarter of the nineteenth century had many stalwarts who articulated economic-liberal nationalist sentiments—Dhadabuoy, Ranade, Bhandarkar, R.C. Dutt, S.N. Banerjee, and later Nehru and others. The earlier phase

[18] Though full length studies on the partisan nature of most of the social science and history paradigms have been rare, increasing attention is being focussed on the topic at the instance of the rise of communalism. See R. Mukherjee (1979), R. Thapar (1975, 1988, 1989, 1992) and R.S. Sharma (1961). Writing in 1961 R.S. Sharma notes: 'The main trends noticeable in the works of recent Indian writers such as Ketkar, Dutt and Ghurye is to present the caste system in such a way as may help to recast it in response to present requirements'; p. 106; see also R.C. Majumdar (1961), and S.K. Mukhopadyaya (1981).

of liberal—nationalism was so far removed from the masses as well as the non-metropolitan elite, and so deeply implicated with colonial bureaucracy that it was rarely distinguishable as a form of nationalism.[19] The drain theory of Dhadabuoy and the economics of R.C. Dutt, when placed in their historical contexts could be better interpreted as a continuity with the liberal tradition within imperialism itself. With the upsurge of cultural nationalism in Bengal and Maharashtra around the turn of the century, the earlier phase was quickly done away with, along with any influence it might have had. Many of the so-called economic-liberals themselves being of the same socio-cultural and economic background helped construct the basic tenets of cultural nationalism itself.[20] And any quarrels they had with the core of cultural nationalists, were about peripherals at the level of tactics and real politics, and consensus with this core was easily visible. Later historiography, in view of the subsequent rise of the aggressive brand of cultural nationalism with all its ugly implications, read back into history the distinction between communal nationalism and secular nationalism. The consciousness that within the nationalist movement some were communal (meaning the exclusion of Muslims from the political arena) and others were secular (meaning the inclusion of Muslims) was a phenomenon of the later half of the 1920s when the foundations of our national society along the lines of cultural nationalism as depicted above had already been laid. This distinctive consciousness could not be attributed to the formative periods of the cultural-nationalist ideology during the entire nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries. What we are suggesting by way of conclusion is, that the several, differentiated articulations of elite nationalisms failed to take a different course of development, much less to strike a new path in

[19] Much of the economic writing of D. Naoroji and R.C. Dutt is indeed a continuity of and a supplement to the liberal traditions within imperialism itself. They rely heavily on the speeches and writings of colonial bureaucrats on the impeachment of Warren Hastings and indicate the way to rule the country so that the welfare of both England and India could be secured and the bond between the two, within the framework of the British Empire strengthened. See D. Naoroji (1990) and R.C. Dutt (1960a); See also D. Argov (1966).

[20] See for example R.C. Dutt (1963a), and R. Ranade (ed) (1992).

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the nation's becoming because they all shared a minimum consensus concerning cultural nationalism. This was because they all emanated from within the same socio-political locale of society and again because their differences were limited to the level of strategy and tactic in real politics. Instead they trailed along with the chief articulators of cultural nationalism as the acceptable and loyal opposition.

The cultural-nationalist ideology, in its three dimensional form, was articulated by the traditionally dominant, literary communities now emerging under the colonial auspices as a class-like social force. If so, what were the positions of the generally lower caste, Muslim and tribal communities *vis-à-vis* this ideology? The common historiographical position on this issue has been to say that the masses were dormant, and if at all there was any activity or ideology among them it was peripheral and tended to be communal-casteist. There was no pattern much less consensus among them, and that they never exhibited any autonomy of inspiration or motivation and hence followed the lead of the imperialists and missionaries in their antagonism to the nationalists. In Chapter III an attempt was made to systematically analyse the socio-political behaviour of the traditionally subaltern groups and it was found that the above historiographical premises are untenable; it is only by detaching the study of nationalism from its historical context is it possible to hold on to them.

In other words, the differentially articulated anti-Brahminic, anti-hierarchical and pro-democratizing aspirations, the individual and collective socio-political behaviour of the lower caste masses to overcome the traditional ascriptive liabilities and their all-out, somewhat autonomous and unauthorized bid to emerge into the public sphere as equals is the historical context, and therefore the legitimate contemporary consciousness, from which the cultural-nationalist ideology needs to be critiqued in order to grasp its social and political implications for wider society.[21] If the earlier chapter dealt

[21] The exclusivism of the cultural nationalists needs to be viewed in the light of consciousness that obtained then. Devotees of Rajaram M. Roy, Bankim, and others, are pained that these stalwarts are arraigned for conduct that was considered praiseworthy in their time, and believe they should not be judged in the light of today's understanding of egalitarianism. The effort in this study has been to show that egalitarian consciousness was very much there during the colonial

primarily with subaltern political behaviour, the attempt here, is to interpret the salient aspects of the subaltern Weltanschauung with which their behaviour was informed. Excavation and reconstruction of subaltern ideology in any context is an exercise in interpretation, for the crucial area lies between scarce articulations and rich everyday forms of resistances, and the situation in India is complicated by its embeddedness in ethnic and linguistic diversities. However, a reading of the available secondary and some primary sources does warrant a two-stage piecing together of subaltern national ideology: the first stage consists of contestation and hence a deconstruction of cultural nationalism, from within the subaltern perspective, presented here as the political implications of cultural nationalism to the larger society; the second stage comprises the construction of an alternate political nationalism dealt with in the subsection below.

Despite the use of socio-politically integrative categories both foreign as well as native, such as nationalism, civilization, culture, heritage, legacy, Indian, Hinduism etc., cultural nationalism of the dominant groups was perceived with remarkable consistency throughout in the subcontinent as Brahminic, with communal exclusivism rationalized through territorial inclusivism. The historical vision of the cultural nation constructed exclusively with the religo-cultural material of the dominant communities, i.e. the Vedic corpus mediated through the Dharmashastras, was perceived to have been built on a parallel political vision of a nation constituted by the same dominant groups and communities as again a more or less exclusive power block. This could not be otherwise in the context of nationalism as a congruence between culture and power.

While the masses perceived themselves to be excluded through communal exclusivism, they felt included through territorial inclusivism; in other words, if they were not welcome within the nation, they were not expected to abdicate the nation-state of which the cultural nationalists hoped to become the sole heirs. Clearly the demand was then to give consent to the legitimacy of the political

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period (and indeed it has been there all along) and evaluation of the cultural nationalists is certainly by their contemporary political nationalists and not by reading back today's conceptions into history, See G. Omvedt (1992).

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and social leadership of the cultural nationalists. This was not all: the third element of the ideology defined the cultural content of the nation as anti-western civil society, modernity etc. In the context of spreading restlessness, political consciousness and socio-cultural organizations of the lower caste masses, the three dimensional cultural nationalism of the dominant groups then came through to the masses not as a call for change towards a new form of society and social relationships, but as a thinly veiled order to revert back to the age old, pre-modern pattern of superordination and subordination with its attendant religio-cultural ideology.[22] Running parallel to the rhetoric of cultural nationalism from its inception during the early nineteenth upto the middle of the twentieth century, the lower caste masses and their spokesmen perceived a consistent line of affirmation in some form or other of the dreaded Varnashrama Dharma as the identifying characteristic of the social synthesis of the nation-to-be. The differences among the cultural nationalists—moderate-extremist, liberal-conservative, heterodox-orthodox, capitalist, socialist etc.—might have been very important for themselves but were removed from the concerns of the excluded communities and their representatives. Here we are not referring only to those subsequently labelled as the Dalits but the entire mass of lower orders—Shudras, Ati-Shudras and other communities differentially alienated in the different regions from the Brahminic dominant caste configurations. These communities were struggling in essence for a principle of egalitarianism as the new norm for social relationships and could not identify in this ostensible diversity a single and significant articulation against Varnashrama Dharma, much less a willingness to join hands on equal terms with themselves to struggle for such an ideal as a vital part of nationalism. Concern for the depressed and

[22] Straightforward glorification of the caste/Varna system and ideology were also not at all rare; Aurobindo (1972) 'caste. ... a supreme necessity without which Hindu civilization could not have developed its distinctive characteristic or worked out its unique mission' vol. 1 p. 537; Lala Lajpat Rai, 'The need of restoring the ancient spirit of Varnashrama system with the change dictated by modern conditions of life' V.C. Joshi (ed) (1966) vol. II p. 257; Vivekananda (1965), 'Caste has kept us alive as a nation' vol. II p. 489; for Nehruvian ambiguity towards caste, see below; and for Gandhi's, see ch. VI.

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the deprived was at first sporadically expressed and later in a more depoliticized, religionized form as anti-untouchability, included within the cultural-nationalist programme. It was not acceptable as a substitute for an all-out transformation from ascriptive hierarchy to egalitarianism as a social ideology which the depressed communities were aspiring for in historical continuity with the subcontinent's traditions of resistance.[23] The writings and speeches of Joti Rao Phule, Sri Narayana Guru, Mangoo Ram, Gurudas, Chandram, Sonnadhar Das, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker and of course Bhim Rao Ambedkar and a host of lesser luminaries—some times systematically but often in fragments, less in secular Western categories and far more in indigenous cultural terms—express and embody the above delineated perceptions and posture towards the cultural nationalists and their ideology. Since articulation, and much less ideological articulation, was not the forte of subaltern people, the writings and speeches of their spokesmen are not to be taken as the sole source from which to interpret the subaltern Weltanschauung. For most of them it is their actions and behaviour that is the most effective articulation of ideology. In the subcontinent of the colonial period, the fact that there was a continuous, consistent and country-wide although uneven, autonomous subaltern political thrust outside the dominant nationalist movement, informed by the above critique of the latter, was dealt with in the earlier chapter. That a similar political thrust and ideology existed within the nationalist movement too is the theme of the subaltern historiographers.

Political Nationalism

Political nationalism has been associated with some form of a democratization process within society and the emergence of the mass

[23] An accurate and the most charitable interpretation of the upper caste concern for the masses is given by S.R. Bald (1982) pp. 4–5. This self-appointed nature of the traditional elite came to a critical point with Gandhi, when he claimed to represent and lead the untouchables 'inspite of them', see chapter on Gandhi. Needless to say, the anti-hierarchy consciousness of the political nationalists had no use for this *nobeless oblige,* and understandably viewed it as the enemy of the new emergence.

into the public sphere.[24] While the specific formulation of this process, the level of mass emergence, the social forces behind it, and its integration into the politico-juridical and administrative structures of the new nation-state might have differed from country to country, the phenomenon itself and its accommodation at least at the level of ideology has been unmistakably identified as the hallmark of political nationalism. The invariable concomitant of such a mass emergence into recognition or new spheres of articulation and assertion is the loss of privileges based on ascription for the traditionally articulate groups—nobility (sacred/secular), and royalty. The abolition of traditional and ascriptive privileges could either mean actual loss of power for these privileged classes or a shift towards a far more flexible and non-fixative basis of power than ascription. In either case, it is a destabilization of the old order of power configuration within society, in favour of the hitherto excluded masses. This loss by the traditionally dominant of their monopoly access to power, combined with the stepping in of the mass into the public/civic arena at least ideologically as equals, lies at the root of the democratization process associated with political nationalism engendering a nation, i.e. a deep sense of comradeship or of equality, expressed through a shared, mediated and much diversified terrain of social power—the civil society. Articulations of political nationalism then are aspiring, advocating, affirming and asserting verbally and through behaviour, such an ideology of socio-cultural democracy.

The successful emergence of political nationalism in Western Europe is mainly attributed to the rise of the bourgeoisie in opposition to manor-based feudalism, at the instance of capitalist expansion, mercantile and industrial, and hence has been labelled bourgeois democracy. Political nationalism is seen here as the ideology of the bourgeoisie rising to power through the market and machines, and thus a result of an antagonism between two sets of elite. However, this transition from serf-feudalism to bourgeois democracy meant liberation of the masses from serfdom, for whom it

[24] For nationalism as democracy, see earlier references to political nationalism, also De Tocqueveille (1970), and R. Bendix (1961). F. Fukuyama (1992): 'Nationalism is a specifically modern phenomenon because it replaces the relationship of lordship and bondage with mutual and equal recognition', p. 266.

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was a genuine democratization process both in the realm of ideology and political economy, brought about as a compromise or compact between the bourgeois and the proletariate in fulfilment, though only partially, of their age-old aspirations, was not fully realized till recently. Socialist and communist interpretations too contributed to this undervaluing of the democratization process by painting it as bourgeois rather than democracy. These different intellectual constructs have been appropriated by the elite of the colonial countries, chiefly to identify internal democratization as the bourgeois democracy of the imperialist West, an imposition of the western way of life on the rest and therefore to be resisted in the name of anti-colonial nationalism. In the subcontinent, it was only too easy and convenient for the traditionally dominant communities, now turning into the new middle classes and aspiring for state power, to forget that internal democratization in the minimum form of ideological abolition of ascriptive privileges and the yielding of public space to the hitherto excluded masses was a historical demand of every complex culture, and resistance to this could not be legitimized even if baptized as anti-colonialism. Anti-colonial cultural nationalism in this context becomes a double edged sword enabling the elite to ascend the throne of the modern nation—state while at the same time substantially defining the nation itself as the same old traditional society.

In the subcontinent unlike in western Europe, the ideology of political nationalism i.e. socio-political egalitarianism, or in our theoretical paradigm, homogenization in the sense of equitable distribution of power within culture, was articulated by the masses themselves. In the absence of a bourgeoisie antagonistic to ascription, lower caste, Muslim and tribal masses voiced this as a continuity of the age-old tradition of resistance to the Brahminic ideology of privileges and caste-based feudalism. The difference between the ideology of social egalitarianism articulated by the lower caste mass and the west European bourgeois democratic liberalism as well as the similarity between the two, are crucial to our understanding of the situation in the subcontinent. Here the struggle for social egalitarianism and abolition of ascriptive privileges did not necessarily imply a wholesale appropriation of the juridico-administrative paraphernalia of bourgeois democracy or of political modernization, yet it embodied the same human aspirations towards equality and equal

recognition that can be identified in all human collectivities. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie here, whether meaning the new traders and industrialists or the educated middle class both of whom were fast becoming part and parcel of the bourgeois colonial, democratic state, had no use for socio-political egalitarianism. Their antagonism to caste-feudalism, if there was any, was certainly not on this question of egalitarian ideology. Partha Chatterjee, after a long and cautious study of nationalism points out in his latest work:

> What we have here is a desire for a structure of community in which the opposite tendencies of mutual separateness and mutual dependence are united by a force that has a greater universal actuality than the given forms of the dominant dharma. For want of a more concrete concept of praxis we may call this desire in an admittedly abstract and undifferentiated sense a desire for democratisation where rights and the application of norms of justice are open to a broader basis of consultation, disputation and resolution ... and yet this democratisation fell short of bourgeois democracy (P. Chatterjee 1994: 197).

The ideology of political nationalism in the subcontinent, except for a handful of non-Brahminic leaders of the Madras and Bombay presidencies, was articulated uniformly by the hitherto excluded or exterior communities, whether described as depressed, untouchable or not. Thus: Ayyankali, Sahodharan Aiyappan, Dr Palpu, Kumaran Asan, Narayana Guru, Iyothee Dass, R. Srinivasan, M.C. Rajah, Varadharajulu, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, T.M. Nair, C. Sankaran Nair, Yellamma, Manjari Hanumantappa, Jotiba Phule, Shivram Prasad Singh, Ghasi Das, Balak Das, Mangoo Ram, Bhimaboi, Sonadhar Das, Swami Achchutanand were spokespersons among numerous others. The general location of these political nationalists at the lower levels of social structure and their cultural embeddedness determined to a large extent their relationship with the masses and the nature of their articulation. Since they did not belong to the traditionally literate communities, most of them were vernacular first-generation-educated and some of them like Ayyankali of Kerala were not literate at all. Their advocacy, therefore was generally in an idiom closer to the masses often oral rather than written. They are better described as rural than urban and those few who spoke

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from the urban platform had not yet severed their connections with land, or rather landlessness. The concerns they articulated revolved around the day-to-day issues and aspirations of the communities they came from. In other words, the political nationalists were merely spokespersons, verbally translating the aspirations and socio-political behaviour of the masses. These and other such circumstances differentiated them from their counterparts—the cultural-nationalists—*vis-à-vis* the mass and belie the proposition, recently advanced somewhat aggressively, that both were elite and their articulations could be comprehended from within a common perspective as 'scramble for crumbs'.[25]

The ideology of political nationalism, of abolition of ascriptive privileges and democratization of society in the subcontinent, was at the primary level translated, concretized and diversified into a series of rights for the lower caste masses, intended to facilitate their emergence into different spheres of the new power and opportunity realm—the civil society. These included the following: right to give up traditional/hereditary occupations and to choose any other, right to ownership of land and to organize one's lifestyle, housing, clothing etc., right to education at par with others, right to jobs, government and private, access to public places—roads, markets, offices etc., right to public resources particularly water, right not to abide by customary forms of agricultural bondage, right of access to religious places, symbols and literature, right to protection by the state and its agencies against their social and economic superiors, and above all right to political self-representation. Through the articulation and advocacy of these and several other rights, although unevenly, throughout the length and breadth of the country, the political nationalists sought to bring about an equalization at the level of the ideology of the masses with the classes within culture.[26] These aspirational articulations through concrete struggles did represent

[25] The Cambridge Scholars, viewing the situation from without, understandably could not distinguish between the struggle of the hitherto excluded castes from the power-manipulations of the traditionally dominant. But a view from within would not only show the difference but also be properly historical.

[26] The demand for colonial state protection through separate legal provisions, as has been pointed out earlier, became an obsessive issue during the subsequent

the attempt of the masses towards emergence not only in political economy but also into political subjectivity. It is necessary to point out that the specific issues chosen for advocacy, the nature of their articulation and the limits etc. were all substantially determined by the age-old historical dynamics of power as resistance of the subcontinent. This was in continuity with pre-modern struggles for equality against the Brahminic principles of hierarchy, exclusivism, privileges and discrimination rather than by any process imitative of western bourgeois democracy.

At the secondary level, these various concrete rights of the masses were sought to be woven together, integrated and elaborated within the ideology of citizenship and the duties of the state by the more westernized sections. Advocacy of rights for the lower caste masses within society was resisted by the dominant and Brahminic communities in general as being against custom and tradition, and by the cultural nationalists in particular as being an imitative process of western culture. Indian culture was presumed to be spiritual, harmonicus and constructed around the notion of duty/Dharma rather than rights. It is precisely at this moment of non-acceptance of and resistance to the new emergence of the masses that political nationalists sought state intervention and protection in the name of equality of citizenship. The political emergence of the masses, was not encouraged nor lead by the rising classes, but was rather sought to be prevented by them and then onwards had to be nurtured by the colonial state along with its typical ambiguities and distortions. The story of protective discrimination of the weaker sections by the colonial state has been told often enough and need not be repeated here. However, the underlying thrust and theory of equality as an aspect of the ideology of political nationalism is hardly noted.

The demand was for equal citizenship as the foundation of all the civil rights movements of the lower caste excluded masses. The intention was to homogenize power and accessibility to power structures within culture, at the instance of the general unwillingness, or resistance by, the dominant communities. This was the

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stages of the struggles, thanks mainly to the upper caste resistance to the mass emergence in the name of cultural-nationalism.

central concern of the more educated political nationalists particularly from the Southern and Western parts of the country—Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar, the non-Brahmins of Madras and the Civil Rights League of Travancore. The century-long experiences and struggles of the lower caste masses had convinced them that their fate could not be entrusted to the so-called majority for as majority that dominance was being interpreted. The most clear expression of this came by way of a combined memorandum of Ambedkar and R. Srinivasan, both belonging to untouchable communities, submitted to the Simon Commission: The depressed classes must be made free citizens entitled to all rights of citizenship in common with other citizens of the state' (B.R. Ambedkar 1982: Vol II, 69). It was thus precisely the antipathy and aversion of the dominant communities and cultural nationalists to the 'unauthorized' emergence of the masses into the public realm that made the political nationalists demand for special state protection, which was subsequently delegitimized as the new enclave of privileges, the exact reversal of what the lower caste leaders intended and demanded.

At yet another level, the actualization of concrete rights for the masses as aspects of equal citizenship, was conceptualized as the very transition to nation and nationhood, and nationalism was seen as the ideology asserting and upholding this transition and the nation's becoming. Writing in the very same year as the birth of the Indian National Congress, Jotiba Phule challenged the 'nationalness' of the new organization with his counter-concept of the nation:

> There cannot be a nation worth the name until and unless all the people of the land of King Bali—such as Shudras and Ati-shudras, Bhils and fishermen etc., become truly educated and are able to think independently for themselves and are uniformly unified and emotionally integrated. If a tiny section of the population like the upstart Aryan Brahmins alone were to found the 'national congress' who will take any notice of it? (J. Phule 1991:Vol II, 29).

Within the non-Brahmin movement of the south, the idea that nation and nationality meant comradeship based on equality of recognition and acceptance runs through as a steady undercurrent. Ramarayaninger, for example at the Coimbatore Conference in 1917 pointed out that '... the nation-building and nation

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regeneration ideas of non-brahmins are different from that of the Congress; it is the democratic idea' (V.T. Naidu 1932: 8–9). And later at the Bikkovale Conference, Venkaratnam Naidu wanted to know whether in societies where the higher castes treat the lower castes as less than human beings, 'Can we expect that sympathy which is the ground work of nationality?' (ibid: 33–4).

The most crucial episode in E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker's early public life was the Gurukulam incident at Shermadevi and the controversies surrounding it. The general position of the cultural nationalists—the Congress and Gandhi—on the practice of untouchability in the ashram made Naicker turn away from them and begin a long militant career of political nationalism. He explained in this context:

> 'The Gurukulam must stand for an ideal—for Indian nationalism—and there should be no invidious distinction between man and man' (E.S. Viswanathan 1983: 49).

Coming down heavily on the Congress brand of nationalism which sought to restore to dominance all forms of religious superstition, Periyar indicated in his inimitable popular style the kind of nationalism he had in mind:

> If we consider, on what must depend the nationalism of a nation, minimally, the people of a nation, without having to sell or bargain their mind or conscience, should be able to eke out their livelihood. More than this there are several other nationalisms: knowledge should grow; education is needed; equality is needed; unity is needed; self-effort is needed; genuine feelings are needed; cheating one another for a living should not be there; lazy people should not be there; slaves should not be there; untouchables, and those who cannot walk on public streets should not be there; like these several more things should be done. (V. Anaimuthu, 1974: Vol I, 372).

Before all else, however, nationalism requires the total abolition of caste and its discrimination based on birth. (ibid: pp. 371–388)[27]

[27] Periyar's ideas on nationalism are collected in V. Anaimuthu (1974) vol. I pp. 371–88.

Finally, it is in the writings and speeches of Ambedkar that the nation-wide civil rights movement of the Shudras and Ati-Shudras is transformed through the concept of equal citizenship into an all-embracing ideology of a struggle and aspiration towards a society built on the modern national principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. Ambedkar's obsession with the liberation of the depressed classes cannot be extricated from his all-important concept of an ideal society in the form of a social democracy; in fact social democracy is the plank from which his concrete struggles and advocacy of untouchables' rights were conducted. Ambedkar had on several occasions talked of the nation, nationality and nationalism not only in the context of the lower castes but also of the Muslims. His concern was obviously for the whole—the nation—of which he hoped the depressed classes would become not only an integral but also an indistinguishable part.[28] His repeated emphasis on nation as comradeship, consciousness of kind, of kith and kinship, of common and united sympathies point to the same direction.

> Nationality is a social feeling. It is a feeling of corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin (B.R. Ambedkar 1990:Vol III, 31).

Defining the ideal society or the nation as democracy, Ambedkar points out that 'Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint, communicated experience' and it is incompatible and inconsistent with isolation and exclusiveness resulting in the distinction between the privileged and the underprivileged (B.R. Ambedkar 1989:Vol VI, 57, 222).

Nation for Ambedkar then, is a new form of social and societal relationship built on the principles of equaltiy, liberty and fraternity. Nationalism is the call given to abolish the Brahminic ideology of privileges and discrimination embodied in the tradition and religion as reinvented by the cultural nationalists. Ambedkar's appropriation of French ideals, far from being an imitation of bourgeois democracy

[28] Note that Ambedkar, M.C. Rajah and other leaders' idea of the lower sections becoming an 'indistinguishable' part of the whole, has been lost in the subsequent struggles for legal protectionism, again thanks largely to the resistance by the dominant communities.

of the West, is merely a modern formulation of the age-old aspiration and struggle of the lower caste masses of the subcontinent towards an egalitarian and democratic society.

Nationalism and the Invention of Tradition

> If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past ... (B. Anderson 1983: 21).

A crucial aspect of the articulation of any nationalist ideology is the intellectual construction of the nation as a continuity from a hoary past. This conjuring up of the nation-to-be from out of a seemingly endless past, through nationalism has multiple functions: one, to give legitimacy to the nation which is made to appear as having always or nearly always existed; two, to indicate the ideological direction the nation is to take in future with its past as the model; and three, to draw the desired line of inclusion and exclusion within society, culture and history. It is this construction of a continuity from the past, through the present, towards the future that constitutes the identity of a people, the soul or the genius of a nation. This cultural-historical construction is no mere reproduction nor, despite claims to that effect, an objectively true representation of the past. On the contrary, the process by which a people becomes self-conscious of its distinct identity is a political one, related to power-relations within and without, and therefore the present power-configuration is the framework from within which the past of a culture is reconstructed through elision, selection, relation, addition etc. into a desired or ideal nation. In short, the construction of histories and invention of traditions in nationalist contexts are intellectual activities of myth-making in modern times, whose political import far exceeds their factual content. Nationalist myth-histories follow more or less a general pattern: the longest possible genealogy is claimed for the society and culture, the continuity of the present with such antiquity is established non-problematically, antiquity itself is presented as glorious and golden, harmonious and peaceful in comparison with the present that needs to be transformed. The transition from the allegedly golden past to the present fallen state is

attributed to factors perceived to be extraneous to the original genius of the culture, and the glorious past is then ideologically transported and projected into the future as the destiny of the people.[29]

While the creation of a political myth-history in the colonial subcontinent too, shared all the above general characteristics, what is of particular importance and relevance to our discussion here is the fact that the myths created here were multiple and full of contestation, and the visions envisaged were polarized and antagonistic. The invention of tradition and the reconstruction of histories based on traditional cleavages within pre-modern society, colonial changes, and political awakening manifested itself trichotomously and eventually settled down to an antagonistic and polarized dichotomy of a meta-discourse and its counter. The meta-narratives of the discovered or imagined India were recited by the cultural nationalists from a position of dominance, in collaboration with British scholars and bureaucrats and these were sought to be challenged and negated through counterrecitals by the political nationalists working somewhat autonomously from the disadvantaged and diversified subaltern positions. The meta-narratives embodying a common vision of the subcontinent's past informs most of the writings of the cultural nationalists—communal or secular, moderate or extremist—and despite differences among themselves, set them antagonistically apart from the counter-vision articulated by the political nationalists.

India Discovered

The following discussion of the reconstructed past espoused by the cultural-nationalist ideologues, is based on Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Discovery of India', by far the most nostalgic and consciously woven text, written while its author was serving a prison sentence in Ahmed Nagar in 1944. The most striking characteristic of this myth-history is the idea that the nation in the subcontinent is ancient, despite occasional claims to the contrary, and is to be identified unambiguously with the Aryans or Indo-Aryans, later called

[29] See S. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (ed.) (1983); also B. Anderson (1983).

Hindus, however meaning again, only caste-Hindus. The history of the subcontinent for Nehru starts with the advent of these Aryan races in the remote past. The subsequent historical development is mainly the story of how these Aryans came, saw and conquered this backward land inhabited by uncivilized people and developed a social synthesis by establishing the Arya Dharma, the national religion and culture—'a conception of obligations, of the discharge of duties to oneself and to others'. These ideals embodied in the life and literature of the Indo-Aryan race, despite successive waves of invasion and conquest by Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Muhammadans, remained practically unchecked and unmodified from without down to the era of British occupation, providing stability, continuity and thus identity to the nation.

> From these dim beginnings of long ago (the Indo-Aryan literature and philosophy mainly the Vedas) flow out the rivers of Indian thought and philosophy of Indian life and culture and literature ever widening and increasing in volume and sometimes flooding the land with rich deposits. During this enormous span of years they changed their courses sometimes and even appeared to shrivel up, yet they preserved their essential identity (J. Nehru 1946: 80–87).

The conquest of the peoples of the land—the Mlechchas, barbarians, primitives, forest dwellers, Dravidians, etc.—whom a 'wide gulf' separated from the incoming Aryan races and to whom the latter 'wconsidered themselves vastly superior', was unique and characteristic of their national genius. Unlike other conquerors of ancient times our Aryan ancestors did not annihilate or 'enslave' the defeated people but in benevolence civilized them by inclusion within the Aryan fold i.e. the nation, as the 'dasa—shudras' in accordance with their natural tendencies and aptitudes.

> ... in the ages since the Aryans had come down to what they called Aryavarta or Bharatvarsha, the problem that faced India was to produce a synthesis between this new race and culture and the old race and civilisation of the land. To that the mind of India devoted itself and it produced an enduring solution built on the strong foundations of a joint Indo-Aryan culture. Other foreign

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elements came and were absorbed. They made little difference (ibid: 138).

And also;

> ... at a time when it was customary for the conquerors to exterminate or enslave the conquered races, caste enabled a more peaceful solution which fitted in with the growing specialisation of functions. Life was graded and out of the mass of agriculturists evolved the Vaishyas, the artisans and merchants; the Kshatriyas or rulers and warriors; and the Brahmins, priests and thinkers who were supposed to guide policy and preserve and maintain the ideals of the nation. Below these there were the shudras or labourers and unskilled workers other than the agriculturalists. Among the indigenous tribes many were gradually assimilated and given a place at the bottom of the social scale that is among the Shudras. The process of assimilation was a continuous one. These castes must have been in a fluid condition; rigidity came in much later (ibid: 85).

In other words, the Indo-Aryans in the course of their conflict with and conquest of the non-Aryans discovered a unique solution to the conflicts in civilization and culture of all times—the Varna/caste ideology—and succeeded in effecting a humane model, a 'national-typical' synthesis which in its original state of vibrancy and flexibility stood for harmony, stability, continuity and therefore identity of the nation down its long and tortuous history. The other two institutional pillars of this 'national-typical' are the village and joint family system.

> All the three pillars of the Indian social structure were thus based on the group and not on the individual. The aim was social security, stability and continuance of the group, that is of society (ibid. 255).

And:

> Over and above these (functional units of social structure) a strong and fairly successful attempt was made to create a common

> national bond which would hold all these groups together—the sense of a common culture, common traditions, common heroes and saints and a common land to the four corners of which people went on pilgrimage. This national bond was of course very different from present day nationalism; it was weak politically but socially and culturally it was strong (ibid. 251).

Though the ideological outlines of this national synthesis were already laid out during the Vedic and Upanishadic periods, the actual working out of the social reorganization was a long drawn-out process that continued despite Buddhist and Jainist challenges till the Kushan period in the third century A.D. The Kushan period was one of 'invasion by strange peoples with strange customs' who 'not only broke up India's political structure but endangered her cultural ideals and social structure also'. In response to this new threat, then, an anti-foreigner resistance movement against the Kushans took shape which was the first nationalist upheaval in the subcontinent, successfully reestablishing the 'nation'.

> The reaction was essentially a nationalist one with the strength as well as the narrowness of nationalism. That mixture of religion and philosophy, history and tradition, custom and social structure which in its wide fold included almost every aspect of the life of India and which might be called Brahminism or (to use a later word) Hindusim became the symbol of nationalism. It was indeed a national religion with its appeal to all those deep instincts, racial and cultural, which form the basis everywhere of nationalism today (ibid: 138).

Buddhism, being similarly a child of Indian thought, had a nationalist background but by becoming a world religion, it had abdicated its nationalist role. Thus it was natural for the old Brahminic faith to become the symbol again and again of nationalist revivals (ibid: 138).

The Brahminic nationalist movement of the Kushan period produced a strong anti-foreigner sentiment, brought about a Brahmin-Kshatriya coalition in defence of their homeland and culture, and ushered in a 'revitalised nation' in the Golden Age of the imperial Guptas during which an 'attempt was made to build up a homogenous state based on old Brahminic ideals. The Golden Age of the

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subcontinent's history was thus a period in which the Brahminic ideals or the Varna ideology was established as state policy, against attempts at disruption/democratization and the Weltanschaung of the age was Brahminic nationalism, or nationalist Brahminism. This pact between, and mutual reinforcement of, Brahminism and nationalism was to repeat itself time and again in history whenever the nation found itself in crisis, for,

> The Aryan faith in India was essentially a national religion, restricted to the land and the social caste structure it was developing, emphasized this aspect of it (ibid: 175).

The great revival of nationalist Brahminism and the cultural renaissance under the imperial Guptas continued for about two centuries, the fourth and the fifth, and eventually declined in attempts to resist the new barbarian invaders—the Huns. In the eighth century Shankaracharya—one among the greatest of India's philosophers—emerged and revived Brahminism/Hinduism by adopting the Sanga tradition of the Buddhists (ibid: 180).

It was not the brilliant Arabs but the Turkish tribes who brought Islam as a significant social force to India (ibid: 227).

> The Moslems who came to India from outside brought no new technique or political and economic structure. In spite of a religious belief in the brotherhood of Islam they were class bound and feudal in outlook. In technique and in the methods of production and industrial organisation, they were inferior to what then prevailed in India. Thus their influence on the economic life of India and the social structure was very little (ibid: 267).

On the whole, the various types of Muslim tribes that crossed the border—Turkish, Afghan and Turco-Mongol or Mogul—did not seek to change the lives of the people, the customs or the tradition and so they were all eventually absorbed within the flow of the mainstream of native culture.

> What is called the Moslem or medieval period brought another change and an important one and yet it was more or less confined to the top and did not vitally affect the essential continuity of Indian life so many of their predecessors in more ancient times

> became absorbed into India and part of her life ....A deliberate attempt was made apart from a few exceptions not to interfere with the ways of the customs of the people (ibid: 237–38).

However, the first half of the second millennium was clearly a period of rigidity, stagnation and decay for the subcontinent. While signs of regression were evident even before the invasions, it was during the Mogul period that the social structure and cultural ideals in conflict with the new, foreign and proselytizing culture became more rigid, insulated and stagnant. The incoming culture was not vibrant or dynamic enough to have a vitalizing influence.

> The last of the so-called Grand Moguls Aurengazeb tried to put back the clock and in this attempt stopped it and broke it up. The Mogul rulers were strong so long as they put themselves in line with the genius of the nation and tried to work for a common nationality and a synthesis of the various elements in the country. When Aurengazeb began to oppose this movement and suppress it and to function more as a Moslem than an Indian ruler the Mogul empire began to break up (ibid: 265).

Basically, the introduction of an alternative belief system and a philosophy which was found to be crude, or the conversions in large numbers by the lower castes and individuals of the upper castes, did not matter, but 'What was objected to was interference with their own social structure and ways of living'. Thus, the second Brahminic national revival (now termed Hindu nationalism of course) though not as glorious as the first one, Nehru says, took place in the seventeenth century when Aurengzeb offended the sentiments of the dominant and ruling communities, the Rajputs, Sikhs and the Marathas, through religio-cultural coercion and oppression.

> All over the widespread domains of the Mogul Empire there was a ferment and a growth of revivalist sentiment which was a mixture of religion and nationalism. That nationalism was certainly not of the modern secular type, nor did it as a rule embrace the whole of India in its scope. It was coloured by feudalism by local sentiment and sectarian feeling ... yet the religion itself had a strong national background and all its traditions were connected with India.

'The Indians', writes Professor Macdonell, 'are the only division of the Indo-European family which has created a great national religion—Brahminism—and a great world religion—Buddhism' .... (and) Shivaji was the Symbol of a resurgent Hindu Nationalism drawing inspiration from old classics ... (ibid: 273).

The coming of the British to the subcontinent however, meant a radical change in the social structure and cultural ideals here. Despite their conservative intentions and associations, the imperial British through their new political structure and the economic change they caused had been playing havoc with traditional Indian society and culture, and particularly the hitherto carefully preserved social hierarchy. In this context, the following is how Nehru envisioned the role of the nation:

> The conflict is between two approaches to the problem of social organisation which are directly opposed to each other .... The Caste system does not stand by itself; it is a part and an integral part of a much larger social organisation. It may be possible to remove some of its obvious abuses and to lessen its rigidity and yet to leave the system intact. But that is highly unlikely as the social and economic forces at play are not much concerned with this super structure .... It has ceased to be a question of whether we like caste or dislike it. Changes are taking place in spite of our likes and dislikes. But it is certainly in our power to mould those changes and direct them, so that we can take full advantage of the character and genius of the Indian people as a whole, which have been so evident in the cohesiveness and stability of the social organisation they built up. Sir George Birdwood has said somewhere: "So long as the Hindus hold to the caste system India will be India; but from the day they break from it, there will be no more India" ... But there is some truth in what Sir George Birdwood said, though probably he did not look at it from this point of view. The break up of a huge and long standing social organisation may well lead to a complete disruption of social life, resulting in absence of cohesion .... Perhaps disruption is inevitable .... Nevertheless we cannot just disrupt and hope for something better .... In the constructive schemes that we may make we have to pay attention to the human material,

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> to the background of its thought and urges and to the environment in which we have to function. To ignore all this and to fashion some idealistic scheme in the air or merely to think in terms of imitating what others have done elsewhere would be folly (ibid: 246–7).

The choice of Nehru's text to elaborate the cultural-nationalist vision of the past was not fortuitous. Apart from the fact that 'Discovery of India' is the most systematically and nostalgically written text, Nehru's image unambiguosly has been that of a modernizer and an indiscriminate one at that; and it is rarely realized how close he was in thought and sentiment to the rest of the nationalist pantheon—Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Gandhi and Savarkar. Therefore contending with Nehru is in a real sense, contending with the meta-narrative of the nationalist vision of the past in its most liberal form. The others embellished, symbolized and to a certain extent simplified the vision for mass consumption: for example, Nehru's ambivalent evaluation of the non-Aryan traditions; pre-Aryan, Buddhist, Islamic and liberal, became more openly devalued and negative in the writings of R.C. Dutt, Bankim, Ranade, Lala Lajpat, Aurobindo, B.C. Pal and others. The Aryanism and Brahminism of the elite Nehru was again transformed in deference to mass sensibilities, into a generalized discourse on Hinduism in most of the works. The harmonious society built on the Brahminic ideals of hierarchy was retailed as Ram Rajya mainly by Gandhi. Despite such a variety of formulations of the past, the common denominator and trajectory in all of them was clear and sharp: the preference for and priority of the Aryan/Brahminic races, their ideology of social gradedness/hierarchy, their constant historical role in developing the identiy of the 'nation', the necessity hence of shaping the nationalist future by salvaging as much of these ideals as possible from multifarious modern attacks. It is precisely this sectarian and select reading of the past, intended to preserve and promote the status quo or rather status quo ante of social power-configuration within society as the scientific history of India, that was challenged and exposed by scores of political nationalists who saw themselves as heirs to other traditions in history.

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Alternate Discoveries and Antagonistic Visions

Alternate and antagonistic discoveries of India, challenging the dominant vision of glorified, nationalized Brahminic hierarchy, as we have already suggested, were attempted from the general subaltern position. The implications of this locale of relative powerlessness were several and significant; first of all, unlike the former, these subaltern visions were not an imperialism-sponsored project and under the concrete, historical circumstances were not only autonomous but by implication a part of a broader anti-imperialist agenda of mass emergence. If the colonial project of extraction of economic and human surplus was constructed on the foundational premise of the traditional status quo, the master mythification of the past was its integral part. The subaltern agenda of mass emergence in constructing divergent and antagonistic mythological histories thus challenged the intellectual foundation of colonialism itself. Secondly, the subaltern imaginings failed to develop and transform themselves into one grand meta-narrative counter to the dominant vision, and their episodic nature was due to their general position of subalternity. However, there is more to this; what is pejoratively labelled as fragmentation is in fact rootedness in and continuity with the culturally diversified traditions of the subcontinent. And so it is only through a strange logic of the dominant political idiom that diversity itself has come to be looked upon as fragmentation, an aspect of subalternity. And thirdly, in the face of the colonial–nationalist and oppressive master-paradigm of history and culture, the subaltern search became multi-directional. It included the repudiation of the meta-narrative, attempts to discover a counter meta-narrative, and constructions of differential and separatist pasts.

The privileging of Brahminic hierarchy as history and legacy by the cultural nationalists triggered off multiple responses from the political nationalists working within the vernaculars in different cultural regions of the subcontinent. What was glorified and upheld as the ideal for the future by the former was now painted as plain horror, to be combated at all costs. Counter-histories of anti-Brahminic egalitarianisms were set up as the alternate nodal points of history. And differential attempts were made to trace out a separatist yet more homogeneous and inclusive history and legacy, at regional and

local levels. Thus both in history and by logic, it was the sectarian, exclusive and partisan reading of the past by the dominant cultural nationalists that was prior to all other forms of sectarianism and exclusivism in modern India. These later were responses and reactions to the communal and somewhat racist exclusivism of the leading groups who expected the continuation of the silence and subservience of the masses. Instead, the subaltern-lower castes despite heavy odds made an all-out bid to emerge by creating autonomous myths and histories, challenging the elite dominant vision.

The great political nationalist ideologues of modern India—Jotiba Phule, Ramaswamy Naicker, Ambedkar and Swami Achchutanand—incessantly and systematically exposed and condemned Brahminical Hinduism as a religion and culture of social slavery, and therefore an enemy of the people struggling to emerge as a modern nation. The ideals and values and the customs and injunctions of Brahminical literature—the Vedas, Upanishads, Ithihasas, Puranas and Dharmashastras—as interpreted and upheld within the competitive politics of modern nationalism appeared to these men as a peremptory call to reinforce and re-establish the Varna ideology of discrimination against the lower classes. Confirmation of this was not lacking in the manifold attempts of the Brahminic and allied classes to prevent mass emergence in the new opportunity structure of education, jobs and political representation. The sacred, national legacy was interpreted as tales fabricated by Brahmins, fantastic, immoral and superstitious, intended to perpetuate Dasa and Shudra slavery. The obvious terrain of contestation was the varna/caste scheme. While an idealized Varnashrama Dharma was found glorious and worthy of export to all other cultures of the world by Tilak, Vivekananda and Gandhi, on the other hand, Phule, Naicker, Swami Achchutanand and Ambedkar considered the Varna scheme to be a plain and painful anachronism that deserved to be dumped, and if it was found to be an integral part of Hindusim then that Hinduism itself *in toto* needed to be given up. Thus Ravan Rajya or Balirajya was preferable to Ramrajya in which Varna would be the national state ideology. In fact one of the major pre-occupations of most political nationalists of all regions was the deconstruction of the emergent Hinduism to reveal its Brahminic form and demystification of it as a new political

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weapon of the Brahminic and dominant groups. Their writings in the vernaculars, intepreting Hinduism and the epics as carriers of the Brahminic ideology of domination, found its echo among the hundreds of thousands of lower caste men and women and continue to be controversial even today.

For the political nationalists the golden age of the subcontinent was the pre-Aryan epoch when social equality was presumed to have flourished and society on the whole was organized on fraternal and democratic lines. In the south and the west the pre-Aryan era was conceptualized as the Dravidian, Adi-Dravidian civilization. The Tamils for example, considered the Sangam Age to be pre-Aryan, believed that in the era there was no caste/varna system and the present lower caste and untouchables were free men, owners of the land and rulers of the people. The ideology of Adi-Dravida extended itself into Adi-Kerala, Adi-Andhra and Adi-Kannadiga, throughout the entire southern peninsula. In the north however, pre-Aryanism expressed itself as Adi-Hinduism and Adi-Dharmism, particularly in the United Provinces and Punjab. Mangoo Ram of Punjab and Swami Achchutanand of the United Provinces believed in and preached pre-Aryan egalitarian principles of the times in towns and cities. The first statement of Adi-Dharma ran thus: 'We are the original people of this country arid our religion is Adi-dharm. The Hindu quam came from outside and enslaved us' (M. Jurgensmeyer 1982: 57). The historical vision of Swami Achchutanand and Ram Charan is paraphrased thus by a scholar:

> The Adi Hindu leaders claimed that there had been ancient Adi Hindu Kingdoms in capital cities, forts and a thriving civilisation. They alleged that when the Aryans invaded the country they conquered these Adi Hindus variously by brute force, repression and treachery .... They then devised the caste system and oppressive social laws, embodied in the vedas and codified in the Manu Smriti in order to relegate the Adi-Hindus to untouchable status and to deprive them of their rights in Society .... The Adi Hindu leaders projected the past not only as a period when the forbearers of the untouchables were rulers but also as a golden age of social equality .... Through their newly constructed history of the original inhabitants of India, the Adi Hindu leaders outlined an

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idealised vision of social equality, and of the past power and glory that the untouchables had lost and were to claim (N. Gooptu 1993: 290–4).

The point of contrast is only too obvious: while the golden age of cultural nationalism was Brahminical consolidation and social inequality; for the political nationalists it comprised precisely social equality and egalitarianism as a principle of organization.[30] Again, the fall or degradation for the former meant an increase in the influence and authority of non-Aryan races or the mixing of castes and races; for the latter the same meant enslavement to the Brahmin/Aryan cultural and social system.

The political nationalists saw themselves as heirs to another tradition of the subcontinent's history—that of resistance, heterodoxy, protest and egalitarianism.[31] The anti-Brahminic traditions of Buddhism and the Bhakti movements of the pre-modern era were appropriated to express the modern socio-political message of equality. The Vaishnavaite Movement of the Shudras—Yadavs, Koeris and Kurmis of Bihar, the Matua cult variation of the same among the Nama Shudras of Bengal, the modern revivals of Kabirpanth, Ravidas Panth etc. among the lower and depressed castes of north and central India are some examples. The renewed interest in Buddhism in modern times is certainly connected with unearthing alternate traditions antagonistic to the Vedic/Brahminic hierarchy. As early as the 1890s, Buddhism was reincarnated among the lower castes of Madras Presidency combined with educational efforts and expansion in the assertion of a new identity. Ambedkar's re-discovery of Buddhism was the most consciously worked out recovery

[30] Note that what was considered the golden age by the cultural nationalists was the period in which untouchability emerged into social significance, see P. Mukherjee (1988) p. 94.

[31] G. Omvedt (1994) pp. 223–59. A full length history of the subcontinent from the anti-Brahminical view was written by Swarm Dharm Theertha (1946). Several other 'histories' lie buried within vernacular traditions, embodying alternate and antagonistic visions, for example, 'the history of the country of Indirars' (Tamil) by Pandit Iyothee Dass of Tamil Buddhism. For an alternate evaluation of tradition particularly of religion, see B.R. Ambedkar (1987) vols. III & IV.

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of traditional egalitarianism in the context of modern nationalism. These multiple discoveries,

> had either created a new symbol or modified the existing ones. For instance, the animal sacrifice was substituted by coconut sacrifice; the sacred thread was replaced by Kanthi (rosary of basil bead); the pattern of diacritical mark was modified; the temples were replaced by monasteries or Gurudwaras: the Vedas were replaced by Guru Granths (sacred texts of Gurus) or living Gurus or by both. They also created their own myths, rituals and practices etc. (N. Gooptu 1993: 104).

If Gandhi was enthralled with the possible re-establishment of the self-sufficient and harmonious little republics in oceanic circles, Ambedkar had nothing but contempt for pre-modern Indian village life.

> In this republic there is no place for democracy. There is no place for equality. There is no room for liberty and there is no room for fraternity. The Indian village life is the very negation of a Republic (B.R. Ambedkar 1989: Vol V, 26).

Attempts were even made to rework the Vedas and Vedantas: although Vivekananda did not find any contradiction between non-dualist philosophy and discriminatory caste practices, the same Advaita became the philosophical foundation for struggle against all social differences and the caste system in the writings of Sri Narayana Guru. The common import of all these variegated reworkings of the resistance tradition was clear enough: if the cultural nationalists claimed continuity with hierarchical Vedic traditions and traced the history of the nation as one of ascriptive gradedness and inequality, the political nationalists claimed continuity with egalitarian heterodox traditions and traced the history of the nation as one of identity of human worth or equality.

Origin myths proliferated among the lower castes in general during the colonial period: the common refrain discernable among them was how they were all equal in the beginning and how they were subsequently deprived and depressed. 'Equal in the beginning' was meant to counter the 'natural' inequality of human beings that the cultural nationalists believed in, preached and practised. Sri Narayana

Guru conducted a practical test to demonstrate the 'natural equality' of all men: he taught the Vedas to a group of students and chose a high caste person to select the best Vedic-recital from among them. When the judge pointed out to a boy, the Guru revealed that he was a Pulaya by caste—the most polluted by Brahmin standards. The contrast here again was the natural versus the historical explanation of the so-called differences of merit among the castes. The contentions of the political nationalists were in the realm of history and their praxis was an agenda to be realized within history.

Alternate discoveries and antagonistic visions by the generally subaltern masses were attended with frantic attempts to overcome their inherited disabilities and they were more often than not beset with desperation and frustration. Their aspirations and socio-political ambitions were not making sufficient and satisfactory headway either with the British or the cultural nationalists. The selfish and imperial calculations of the former and the monopolism and exclusivism practised by the latter in the context of skewed economic change, generated a solid and combined fortress which precluded mass access. Frustrated mass emergence was beginning to look for other avenues when it was increasingly becoming clear that within a unitary form of society and state it was nearly impossible to realize the age-old dream and tradition of socio-political equality. Ambedkar was satisfied with making a symbolic gesture of religious separatism by renouncing the Hindu fold and becoming a Buddhist. In the north the political nationalists Swami Achchutanand, Ram Charan and Mangooram toyed with the idea of a separate quam and Achchutistan. The Sikhs too raised the demand for a separate Punjab, and in the south, anti-Brahminism transformed itself through the demand for self-respect into a Dravidian Movement for a separate Tamil region. The tribals, wherever they found themselves in numerical strength and occupying contiguous territories, raised the slogans of Adibasi/Munda/Birsa Raj. While these separatist rumblings, religio-cultural or politico-cultural, were largely contained within the level of society at least during the colonial period, the same was not true of the Muslim demand for Pakistan.

The Muslim middle class, or what went by that name among the Muslims, for it was never appreciable in size and shape, struggled for a long time without working out an alternate vision for themselves.

Their demand all along had been political nationalist in nature, demanding acceptance and encouragement of their emergence as much as the other lower castes, yet they were participating in the political activities of the cultural nationalists, struggling within them for a fair share of social and political power. However, when it became clear that integration within the nation-state was pre-conditioned by the acceptance of a peripheral position within the nation they began their search for greener pastures using their rich religious traditions, myths and memories.

The main ideologues of Muslim nationalism—Syed Ahmed Khan, Iqbal and Jinnah—all started out as staunch pan-Indian nationalists and only subsequently turned separatists. The first articulations of the separatist Muslim national consciousness, by consensus, can be traced to the 1860s when Ahmed Khan's ambiguous statements were expressed when the demand for replacement of Urdu by Hindi in the UP administration was raised. Khan's concept of 'quam' too, varied from time to time. But what is of significance is his stress on education, much in the same way as that by the lower classes and castes in general. Iqbal's dream of a homeland for Muslims was pretty late in coming during the first decade of the present century, and revolved around the northwest region although the status of the region as province or nation remained ambiguous. Jinnah's term of struggle with the cultural nationalists was the longest. Without however, minimizing the inherent ambiguities of the colonial situation, the growing power and territorial spread of Islam and the later virulence of the Muslim 'communalists' themselves, it could still be said that during the pre-Khilafat period the thrust of the Muslims in general was power sharing and progress through education. Their separatist imaginations and visions, riddled with several ambiguities, never managed to mobilize the culturally scattered Muslim masses at the subcontinental level, but continued to be a phenomenon of certain areas only and as such were very much within the power of the cultural nationalists to contain and hegemonize.[32]

[32] Basic readings for Muslim political/cultural imagining are the writings of S.A. Khan, Iqbal and Jinnah; and also see K.K. Aziz (1987), A. Aziz (1967), S.N. Ahmed (1991), F. Malik (ed) (1971) etc; and B.R. Ambedkar's (1990) vol 8.

Later historiography, due to contemporary political compulsions, sought to apportion equal responsibility and blame to both Hindu and Muslim communalisms or exdusivist visions. But at the level of society it was the social and cultural separatism of the dominant castes that was prior both-logically and historically. Aspirations for political separatism on the part of the Muslim elite was truly a fall-out of their inability to secure an honourable place within the sectarian national vision of the cultural nationalists.[33]

Gandian political philosophy and praxis attempted to collapse these antagonistic and alternate visions into a unitary societal form in consonance with the unitary state structure erected by British Imperialism. Did it succeed in its historical mission?

[33] While the theme 'Hinduism in danger' was at the very root of nationalist political awakening, the slogan, 'Islam in danger' was raised only during the last decade of the colonial rule, see B. Chandra (1984) pp. 163 ff.