MODERNITY AND NATIONALISM: THE CASTE QUESTION

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APPU JOSEPH JOSE

Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067
2002

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067. INDIA

CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the Dissertation entitled **Modernity and Nationalism: The Caste Question** submitted by me **Appu Joseph Jose**, **Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work and has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or diploma in any other university.

Appu Joseph Jose

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**.

Professor Rakesh Gupta
(Chairperson)

Professor Zoya Hasan
(Supervisor)

Tel. : 6107676, 6167557] 2413 Fax : 011-6165886 Gram : JAYENU

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Any inadequacy in this dissertation, and there are bound to be some, is my own responsibility.

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Appu Joseph Jose

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Chapter 1

Introduction

At the risk of simplification, it can be said that modernity is a social formation characterized by individualism, instrumental rationality and utilitarianism. Critics of modernity argue that since modernity is premised on the idea of a rational, freely choosing individual; it is not informed by ultimate values and therefore leads individuals to a moral void.

However, the idea of the self-reflexive rational agent does generate a set of normative ideas. Ideas like the inherent worth of individuals; equality of all individuals; individual liberty; brotherhood of all individuals and tolerance of differences among individuals; all emerge directly from the notion of a rational self reflexive agent. Dipankar Gupta lists the following as the normative ideas associated with modernity: dignity of the individual; adherence to universalistic norms; elevation of individual achievement over privileges or disprivileges of birth and accountability in public life.[1]

Now where does nationalism fit into all these? Nationalism is the insistence that the legitimate unit of political authority be a culturally contiguous area and that positions of authority therein be manned (sic) by people of the same culture.[2] Implicit in this popular definition of nationalism is the idea that people sharing an identical

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[1] Dipankar Gupta, *Mistaken Modernity: India between Worlds* (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2000), p.2.
[2] Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Phoenix Press, 1998), p.6.

culture form a community and therefore this community should be politically sovereign. Such an idea that people sharing a culture but not even seeing each other are part of the same community is absolutely novel.. It can come only with modernity.

What is it about modernity which makes nationalism possible? Before an answer is attempted, it is useful to remember that in pre modern societies, the idea of the rational self reflective agent is absent. Human beings (one cannot talk of individuals, as yet) are born into a particular face to face community. They partake of the identity of that community and are incapable of seeing a human solidarity beyond face to face limits. Society consists of various strata of people each keen to distinguish itself from the other. With modernity comes the idea of freely choosing individuals. Since all humans are seen as freely choosing entities, equality of men/women becomes an important value in modern societies. Individuals freely acting can forge wider solidarities; trans-local communities which go beyond face to face limits. Such trans-local communities made possible by modernity are nations. If this argument is to be stretched, it may mean that modernity can create a nation of all men and women.[3]

However, nation formation does not quite happen in the aforesaid manner. Ernest Gellner explains that the extent of a nation is limited by the extent to which a high culture can be stretched. What happens during nation formation is that a particular high (literate) culture becomes democratized and accessible to all members of the

[3] Ibid., p.31.

society. The idea of a cultural community emerges. For Gellner, that is the nation. He argues that the material processes of modernity like industrialism and capitalism play the key role in the democratization of culture in an area.[4]

Gellner's account of nationalism is plausible and useful but by no means the only one. He overlooks the normative side of nationalism. A nation is a community like no other. It is a community of strangers, made possible, because in the modern era all individuals are assumed to have a basic human worth and therefore all individuals can be fellows. Gellner's account explains why the fellowship of the nation is perforce limited.

Once a national community is conceptualized, and this can happen only with modernity, the tendency is to deny its novelty. It is almost as if the community of the nation cannot accept the contingencies and the voluntariness involved in its formation. The nation, or rather the articulate and imaginative elements in the nation, conceives it as a quasi divine solidarity existing from the 'dawn of history'. Once the modernity of the nation is denied, it becomes merely a distinctive cultural community. Traditional cultural practices are eagerly defended as national typical phenomena. The normative ideas of modernity are kept at arms length in the cultural community of the nation.

In colonized societies, nationalism is the outcome of colonial modernity. Nationalism – the sense of being a distinct cultural

[4] Ibid., p.31-36.

community – is used as a weapon in anti-colonial struggles. Since modernity is seen as an attribute of the colonizer, it is kept away from the sphere of the cultural community of the nation. It is a deeply paradoxical situation. Modernity begets nationalism and nationalism, metaphorically, shows modernity the door.

The tension between modernity and nationalism is a universal phenomenon. In the case of anti-colonial nationalisms, the tension is more exaggerated. This dissertation is an effort to understand nationalist thought in India using the theme of the tension between nationalism and the values of modernity. The ideas of three seminal figures of Indian nationalism, viz. Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar are examined. Their responses to the 'caste question' are used to interrogate their nationalism and modernity. Caste, for the purposes of this dissertation, is taken as a social institution, pre modern in character and completely antithetical to the values of modernity.

Chapter 2 looks at the conceptual issues involved in the debate between modernity and nationalism closely. The third chapter is a study of Gandhi's nationalist thought. It is suggested that Gandhi's nationalism forced him to look askance at modernity. The Chapter 4 is on Nehru. It is argued that Nehru was committed both to nationalism and modernity. This produced certain ambivalence in his attitude towards tradition, which is reflected in his views on the caste question. Chapter 5 deals with Ambedkar's ideas. He stood at the other end of the modernity-nationalism spectrum. Ambedkar wanted to liberate a section of India weighed down by traditions. He knew that

modernity alone would liberate them. Ambedkar could not possibility support a nationalism which blindly defended tradition. Ambedkar's commitment to modernity effectively meant that he rejected the dominant discourse of nationalism. The concluding chapter looks at some of the larger issues springing from this debate.

Chapter 2

Modernity and Nationalism: A Tense Relationship

This chapter tries to establish a conceptual link between nationalism and modernity. It posits that normative dimensions of modernity are desirable and should inform all understandings of the nation. This chapter seeks to understand why nationalism despite being a modern phenomenon sometimes turns antithetical to the values of modernity. It is suggested that there is a real tension between nationalism and values of modernity and that this tension could be used as a framework to probe and understand nationalist thought.

Modernity and its Normative Concerns

Modernity is a social formation that explicitly emerged in Western Europe by the 18th century, a period often referred to as 'Enlightenment'. This is not to say that a new social formation emerged as it were out of the blue. Modernity or modern civilization was the product of incremental changes that had been taking place for centuries and by the 18th century, a social formation which could be regarded as distinctly new, emerged. As a social formation, modernity pre-supposes a set of cultural ideas which are institutionally

entrenched. These ideas and institutions have European/Western moorings but have become more or less world wide in their influence.[1]

At the core of modernity are the notions of self reflexivity, individual agency and also a new historical consciousness.[2]

Charles Taylor[3]gives an account of how the modern subject, the self reflexive agent evolved. He argues that three constitutive ideas go into the creation of the modern self. These are: the idea of individual inwardness, affirmation of ordinary life and expressivist notion of nature as an inner source.

The idea of 'inwardness of the individual' is a sharp break from all pre-modern philosophies which conceived the individual as being part of a larger cosmic order. According to pre-modern philosophies – be they Platonic, Stoic or Epicurean – to use ones reason was to discover and to take ones position in the larger cosmic order. However, the modern idea of inwardness – in whose making, the theories of Descartes and Locke played key roles – consists in using ones reason not to understand ones position in some larger transcendental world but to discover and appropriate a new order very

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[1] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p.1. Also see Bjorn Wittrock, "Modernity: One, None or Many? European Origins and Modernity as a Global Condition", *Daedalues* (Winter 2000), p. 38.
[2] Bjorn Wittrock, "Modernity: One, None or Many ? European Origins and Modernity as a Global Condition", *Daedalus* (Winter 2000). p. 49.

[3] Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. ix, x.

much in this world. The implication of this idea is that man has what it takes – within him – to master the world.[4]

The second key idea that shapes the modern notion of the self is the `affirmation of ordinary life', the view that mundane everyday life is as worthy of living and deserving of respect as any other. In sharp contrast to this, in all pre-modern societies 'the good life' was something other than the mundane life. It could be the priestly life, a life of letters or an aristocratic life, but certainly not the life of an artisan, peasant or householder.

Baconian ideas about knowledge which regard practical or useful knowledge as more worthy and the early Protestant Christian idea of 'calling' – the idea that one can glorify God by excelling in whatever station of life one finds oneself in – played important roles in affirming ordinary life as worthy. The implications of this idea are many; the most obvious being the dignity it imparts to the individual and the potential for radical egalitarianism in society.[5]

The two constitutive ideas of the modern individual subject, viz. the inwardness of individual and the affirmation of ordinary life place the individual apart from and in an instrumental relationship with nature. According to Taylor, the third constitutive idea of the modern subject – the 'expressivist notion of nature as source' seeks to reverse this. Philosophers like Rousseau, Kant, Hume and the 18th century

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[4] Ibid., part 2, esp.pp.124-126.

[5] Ibid., part3,esp.Chapter 13.

Romantics saw nature, both outside and inside man, as good. To realize it fully, the individual had to, as it were, dip into it and express the inner elan, the voice or impulse of nature.[6] Expressivism becomes the basis for a new and fuller individualism. Each individual comes to be regarded as different and original. This originality determines how one should live. Modernity comes to value creativity.[7]

The concept of the self reflexive agent, one of the key elements of the social formation called modernity, gives modernity a set of normative concerns. These include notions of individual dignity; autonomy and negative freedom; disregard for assumed hierarchies in societies; a passion for egalitarianism; concern to reduce individual suffering and demand for universal beneficence and justice.[8]

Modernity also develops institutions which entrench these ideas. In one account the institutions of modernity are liberal market economy, modern nation state, constitutional democracy and legally delineated public and private spheres.[9] For Anthony Giddens, the

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[6] Ibid., p. 374.

[7] Ibid., Chapter. 21.

[8] Ibid., Chapters. 22, 25.
Where does Taylor's account leave Enlightenment a period traditionally regarded as inaugurating modernity? Taylor does not believe that all aspects of the modern self are a legacy of the Enlightenment. He does concede that several inchoate ideas became explicit and got radicalised during enlightenment. Peter Hamilton gives a check list of ideas that emerged during Enlightenment and played a key role in forging intellectual modernity. These are: individualism, reason, freedom, uniformity of human nature, science, universalism, secularism, toleration and progress. The normative ideas of modernity which I traced form Taylor's account are not dissimilar. See Peter Hamilton, "Enlightenment and the Birth of Social Science", in Stuart Hall and Brian Gieben eds., *Formations of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992). pp. 22-23.

[9] Bjorn Wittrock, "Modernity: One, None or Many", pp. 47-48.

institutional dimensions of modernity are capitalism, pervasive surveillance, military power and industrialism.[10]

An account has been given about self reflexivity and agency, two of the three notions at the core of modernity. The third one is a new historical consciousness. This is related to a new conception of time itself, which in turn is linked to the emergence of a self reflexive agent.

Pre-modern conception of time was cyclical. Human time was assumed to partake of the cyclical character of all created matter. Just like cycles of day and night, of seasons, and of generations, human kind was supposed to be caught up in a time that was repetitive and regular. There was, in other words, little to distinguish between cosmology and history. This notion of time gave a certainty to everyday life, helped men to come to terms with fatalities and offered men redemption from them.

In the pre-modern notion of time, there was no chronology. Human time was caught up in divine, cosmic themes (which were assumed to be cyclical). Events were not seen as related in a cause and effect manner; rather events were believed to follow from a larger divine scheme. So a particular thing had to take place at a particular time. A change came about only by the latter half of the 18th century with the entrenchment of the idea of the self as a reflexive agent. To be an agent was to have an existence apart from and in defiance of

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[10] Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, pp. 55-63.

assumed notions about space, place and time.[11] So time becomes uniform and empty. When this notion was combined with the visible material advancements of the period, a new historical consciousness developed. History came to be seen as linear, irreversible and steadily improving. This was the idea of progress.[12]

Importantly, the dis-embedded (i.e., freed from space, place, time constraints) individuals could forge wider solidarities with people who shared an identical calendrical time. That is to say, non-primordial communities (nations included) could now be forged.

The normative promises of modernity were 'self consciousness, self determination and self realization' for all individuals.[13] It also creates the objective and subjective conditions for a number of institutions, most importantly the nation. The question is whether the pursuit of the institutional accoutrements of modernity tends to submerge its normative projects.[14]

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[11] Giddens describes this process as the 'disembedding of space-place-time co-terminality'. See Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity,* pp. 17-21.

[12] For more on time, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 22-31.
Also see Krishan Kumar, *From Post Industrial to Post Modern Society: New Theories of the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 68-75.

[13] Jurgen Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 338.

[14] More on this in the latter part of this chapter.

Nationalism, Nations and Modernity

Nationalism is a doctrine which holds that nations real or constructed must have primacy over all other human institutions.[15] Nations are political communities regarded as limited and sovereign and where a fraternal bond is supposed to inform the relations among its members.[16] Nationalism and nation are concepts which are deeply contested. However, the aforesaid formulations are usually accepted by theorists across divides and they provide a useful starting point for a deeper exploration. I hope to show that nations are essentially modern and as such they should embody the normative ideals of modernity.

Modernity replaces 'hierarchical mediated access societies' with 'horizontal direct access societies'. In a society of the former kind, a person belongs to a particular stratum of society and not to the society as such.[17] This transformation is accomplished largely by capitalism. By taking the economic activities outside the household sphere, it undermines the rationale which sustains corporations and strata within societies. Household becomes a private sphere and persons become private individuals. State, in turn, becomes functionally specialised and politically sovereign within a certain area.

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[15] John Hall, "Nationalism: Classified and Explained", *Daedalus* (summer, 1993), p.38.

[16] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.5.
This is a slightly modified version of Anderson's celebrated definition.

[17] Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism", in Rajeev Bhargava ed., *Secularism and its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 39-40.

Individuals, freed from corporate ties can establish voluntary and horizontal ties. In the economic sphere, this results in the establishment of civil society. Parallel to it, there comes the idea of a political community of free individuals, a sphere which can be called the nation. Nationalism in this sense is a way of integrating abstract and atomised individuals based on the notion of citizenship.[18]

The project of nationalism, to begin with, was the creation of a sovereign political community of free and equal individuals. So it was essentially a republican project. Hobsbawm calls such nationalism, state patriotism. The earliest nationalisms- nearly all modern theorists of nations trace the earliest nationalisms to the late 18th century – viz. American, French, Dutch all belonged to this type. In each of these cases ethnicity or other aspects of historic continuity were irrelevant to the nation and language was relevant only on pragmatic grounds.[19] The nationalists and patriots were fired by the vision of establishing a radically new society, based on modern values and were acutely conscious of the novelty of their venture.[20]

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[18] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
If we compare Habermas' analysis of the emergence of 'public sphere' and Anderson's account of the emergence of nations, then it is quite clear that both are virtually the same except that Andersons regards nation as a community.

[19] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 87.

[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 193.

The logic of 'consent based political communities[21] (or nations) is inherent in the breakdown of pre-modern societies. Benedict Anderson digs deeper into the relationship between modernity and nationalism.[22]

Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community which is imagined as limited and sovereign and where comradely ties are assumed to exist among its members. Anderson shows that nations defined thus are modern.[23]

Nations are trans-local communities where members don't see each other, that is why a nation is an 'imagined community'. They emerge following the breakdown of pre-modern, trans-local communities like churches and empires. Anderson shows that modern ideals of individualism undermine transcendental values which support pre-modern trans - local communities.[24]

Imaginations about new trans-local solidarities are made possible partly by ideas about secular-time.[25] When individuals are seen as existing simultaneously in secular time, it is not difficult to see them as forming one community, the community of the nation. As long as time is interwoven with various kinds of higher time, there is

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[21] This is an expression used by Jean Hampton to describe modern nations. See Jean Hampton, *Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 6.

[22] Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities.*

[23] Ibid., p. 5.

[24] Ibid., p. 36.

[25] Ibid., pp. 22-27.

no guarantee that all events can be placed in unambiguous relations of simultaneity. A purely secular-time understanding, allows us to imagine society horizontally.[26]

Facilitating this process are developments in technology and economy. Anderson argues that 'print capitalism' is crucial in the initial emergence of nations. If capitalism in the print arena has to survive, then it must be in the vernaculars. Once vernacular languages are used in print, they acquire a certain standardisation and uniformity across a large area. People who consume the products of print capitalism, news papers etc., come to feel a sense of comradeship.[27]

Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism is quite different from Anderson's. For Gellner, nationalism is a political principle that cultural and political units be congruent. National sentiments are aroused either when this principle is accepted or when it is rejected.[28] It has to be said that this definition of nationalism accords with commonsensical views.

However, Gellner argues that nationalism is a modern phenomenon. Historically, political units have seldom coincided with cultural units. They have either been smaller than nations, such as

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[26] Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism", pp. 41-42.

[27] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Chapter 13.

[28] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 1.

city- states, tribal organizations etc. or larger, such as empires. People found nothing amiss in this, neither inconvenient nor unnatural.[29]

In pre-modern societies culture was not very important, but structure was. Societies were differentiated into strata and high culture of the elite was a means of differentiation. Such a stratified society was functional for the operation of an agrarian economy. People (elites) of different high cultures could negotiate and get along but there were few connections between people of high and low cultures. In other words, in a traditional milieu, the ideal of a single overriding cultural identity did not make sense.[30]

With modernity – for Gellner industrialism is its most important attribute – economic units become wider and individuals become mobile. A certain degree literacy is essential to survive in an industrialised society. 'Decontextualised' communication across society becomes imperative. In such a situation, one high culture gains dominance over a large area. It gets standardised through mass primary education. Nationalism, the principle that human groups must be organised into large culturally homogenous units, starts making sense. Once a shared high culture emerges, the need is felt for a state to buttress it.[31]

Gellner admits that nationalism and nations are modern phenomena. But he assumes that cultural homogeneity is a condition

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[29] Ernest Gellner, *Thought and change* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965), p. 152.

[30] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp.11-13

[31] Ibid., pp. 32-35.

for nationalism. He refuses to see nations as the products of wilful action of constituting a political community, possible only in the modern era.

Habermas and Hobsbawam – among others – hold the view that nations originally emerged as a result of conscious action. However, they concede that the original 'republican' idea of the nation gave way to the 'nationalist' idea. The latter idea implies that citizens of a republic are in possession of a shared history, language and culture. The nationalist idea of the nation is constructed by intellectuals in terms of myths, histories and literary traditions which become widely disseminated through mass media. The cultural identity provides the socially integrating substrate for the political identity of the republic. So citizenship is spelt out in a double code: it extends beyond legal status defined in terms of civil rights to the membership of a culturally bound community.[32]

Hobsbawm shows that it was from 1830 onwards that nationalism of the nationalist variety got the better of nationalism as 'state-patriotism'.[33] He sees it as a response to the challenge of managing state society ties in a direct access society.[34] Nationalism

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[32] Jurgen Habermas, "The European Nation-State-Its Achievements and Its limits: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship", in Gopal Balakrishnan ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 284-286.

[33] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 23.

[34] Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Mass Producing Traditions: Europe 1870-1914", in Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *Invention of Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 264.

becomes a civic religion.[35] This in turn requires 'invention of traditions'. Europe between 1870-1914, saw the 'mass invention of traditions', all designed to assert the cultural continuity and homogeneity of nations.[36]

Nationalism thus underplays its modernity. It is eager to project itself as a repudiation of 'bloodless cosmopolitanism'. "Nations", says Gellner, "are gesselschaft using the idiom of gemeinschaft; a mobile autonomous society simulating a closed society."[37]

Is it really the case that modernity brings together atomised men in a nation and then they invent the fiction that they had been a homogeneous community all along?

Eric Hobsbawm argues that national movements build on already existing feelings of collective belonging, on proto-nationalism. Religion, ethnicity, language can all serve as proto-national bonds, but their actual transition to nations is extremely complex and by no means assured.[38]

Anthony smith makes a stronger case; he argues that nations have 'ethnic cores' and ethnic identity is not a recent invention. Rather 'ethnies' – at least in Europe and Middle East – have existed for centuries. He defines 'ethnies' as "named human populations with

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[35] Ibid., p. 269.

[36] Ibid., p. 303.

[37] Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Phoenix Press, 1998), pp. 73-74.

[38] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, pp. 46-47.

shared ancestry myths, histories and culture, having an association with specific territory and possessing a sense of solidarity".[39]

Smith recognises that there are no direct or determinist links between ethnies and modern nations. Modern nations possess in addition to characteristics of ethnies identified above, legal, political and economic unity. Many ethnies did not become nations. But the objective reality of the past does matter for modern nations. Without what he calls 'myth symbol complexes', which express ethnic identity, modern nationalism would be rootless and arbitrary.[40]

To quote A. Smith:

> Even today, a nation quo-nation must possess a common history and culture, that is to say, common myths of origin and descent, common memories and common symbols of culture. Otherwise, we would be speaking only of territorial states. It is the conjunction and interpretation of these cultural or ethnic elements with the political, territorial, educational and economic ones, that we may term civic, that produces a modern nation.[41]

John Breuilly has pointed out that the primordial view of nationalism, which Smith espouses, has little value. Pre-modern ethnic identities had little institutional embodiment beyond the local level. All the major institutions that construct, preserve and transmit national identity and which connect these identities to interests are

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[39] Anthony D. Smith, "The Origin of Nations", in Vincent P. Peccora ed., *Nations and Identities: Classic Readings* (London: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 336-337.

[40] Ibid., p. 338.

[41] Ibid., p. 341.
Also see Anthony D. Smith, "Nationalism and the Historians", in Gopal Balakrishnan ed., *Mapping the Nation*, pp. 192-193.

modern. They include parliaments, popular literature, courts, schools and labour market. Pre-modern institutions which could have played such a role, viz. churches and dynasties, stand in a highly ambivalent relationship to ethnic identity. They play such a role only when they come into conflict with more powerful dynasties and churches.[42]

Conceding, for the sake of argument, that the primordialists have a case, even they agree that ethnies undergo decisive changes in the modern era. The most important change is a normative one. Nation is unique and modern in the sense that it is a community of equals, of comrades, where fraternity prevails. The whole burden the argument till now has been to show that only under conditions of modernity can such a community be envisaged. Nation's worth lies in the dignity it confers on large sections of society, sections which were denied such a dignity in pre-modern communities.[43] Miroslav Hroch suggests that even nationalism of the nationalist variety is a struggle for modern liberal freedoms. They take the nationalist form for want of political education.[44]

There is always a tension between republican and nationalist principles of the nation. While the former offers universal rights, the latter espouses values unique to a certain culture. The project of

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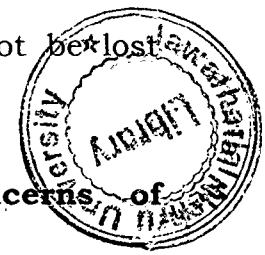
[42] John Breiully, "Approaches to Nationalism", in Gopal Balakrishnan ed., *Mapping the Nation*, p. 154.

[43] Liah Greenfield, "Transcending the Nation's worth", *Deadalus* (Summer 1993), p. 49.

[44] Miroslav Hroch, "From the National Movement to the Fully Formed Nation: Nation Building Process in Europe", in Gopal Balakrishnan ed., *Mapping the Nation*, p. 32.

modernity which nationalism seeks to carry forward is doomed if the ethnic or nationali ersion of the nation dominates. This does not mean that nation m has to be abstract or acultural. While contextualising nationalism, the republican ideal must not be lost sight of.[45]



Anti-colonial Nationalism and the Normative Concerns of Modernity

Benedict Anderson has shown that nationalism in the colonial world is an outcome of colonial modernity. Colonialism results in the emergence of a civil society in countries under colonial sway. Such a civil society stands above particularistic identities within the country. A bilingual intelligentsia, with access to metropolitan ideas of nationalism and modernity and yet dissatisfied with the stifling conditions of colonialism, emerges. They are in a position to 'imagine' a nation coterminous with colonial civil society. Given the existence of the paraphernalia of a modern civil society, not least among them 'print capitalism', the imagined nation becomes a potent idea. An anti-colonial nationalism is born.[46]

Nationalism in the colonial world, in so far as it is a product of modernity, represents an effort to actualise in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress. Yet, to the extent that nationalism in the colonial world seeks to forge a political community

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[45] Jurgen Habermas, "The European Nation-State", pp. 286-289.

[46] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Chapter 7.

in opposition to colonial power, it cannot remain merely imitative of western processes.[47]

Edward Said[48] has shown that colonialism is not merely the conquest and rule of one country by another. Colonialism legitimises itself through the 'discourse of orientalism'. The colonial world – the orient, mostly – is essentialised as all that the colonizer is not. The colonizer thereby assumes a moral authority to rule the colony as a legitimate civilising enterprise. Ashis Nandy[49] has shown that colonialism colonizes the mind and convinces the colonized that they need to be guided. Colonialism builds up an 'ideology of difference' between the colonizer and the colonised.[50] Any resistance against colonialism must perforce come to terms with the cultural ideology of colonialism.

How does an anti-colonial nationalism respond to the ideologies of colonialism? Nandy suggests that the best way would be to ignore the artificially constructed colonial differences and not to respond along the

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[47] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 2.

[48] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1978), Chapter I.

[49] Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. XI.

[50] To see how the British Raj Built up an ideology to legitimize itself, see Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj, New Cambridge History of India, III.4* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

lines of colonial stereotypes.[51] Other (post-colonial) theorists have suggested that 'mimicry' i.e. aping the colonizer, or hybridity – the use by the colonized of the resources (intellectual and conceptual) of the colonized as also racial miscegenation and the emergence of a hybrid population – as potent strategies to come to terms with the ideologies of colonialism.[52]

However the strategy most often used by anti-colonial nationalisms is actually to appropriate the binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonial world and then seek to rehabilitate the cultural identity of the latter, disparaged by colonialism.[53] Anti-colonial nationalism is thus a struggle to represent, create or recover a culture and selfhood that has been systematically repressed or eroded by colonial rule. Franz Fanon has articulated the idea well:

> The belief in a national culture is in fact an ardent, despairing turning towards anything that will afford the colonised a secure anchorage. In order to ensure his salvation and to escape from the culture of the colonizer the native feels the need to turn backwards towards his unknown roots and to lose himself, at whatever the cost, among his own people.[54]

Cultural nationalism, as theorists like Edward Said, Benita Parry and Franz Fanon recognise, is a legitimate enterprise in the struggle against colonialism. Yet it has its pitfalls. In its efforts to

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[51] Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Emery*, Essay 1.

[52] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Post Colonialism* (London: Rutledge, 1998), p. 176.

[53] Ibid., pp. 181-182.

[54] Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farmington (London: Penguin 1967), p. 175.

shield and nurture what it understands as pristine national culture, it ends up defending essentialist, ahistorical and orientalist versions of that culture. So also the so called national culture comes to be insulated from even the normative concerns of modernity in the name of opposing colonialism.[55]

Coming to the Indian situation, it can be said that India has existed as a civilizational entity for a long time but became a nation – in the sense in which the term was used earlier in this chapter– only in the not too distant past. Nationalism arose in India under conditions of colonial modernity.

Under conditions of colonial modernity, identity formation of a new type started occurring. In a pre-modern society identities are always local and inchoate. However, with modernity, supra-local identities of religion, region and caste begin to emerge. This was partly an outcome of British administrative policies such as standardization of religious laws, creation of new census categories etc. Once such supra-local identities were forged, they began to get modernized and started acquiring associational manifestations. These identities became well established thanks to improved communication networks in the emerging civil society.[56]

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[55] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), Chapter.3, "Resistance and Opposition"; Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, Chapter.4, "On National Culture". Also, Benita Parry, "Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism", in Padmini Mongia ed., *Contemporary Post Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996).

[56] Ian Talbott, *India and Pakistan: Inventing the Nation* (London: Arnold, 2000), Chapters 1 and 2.

The nation, a community encompassing the entire territorial limits of the country, also began to be imagined in a process not dissimilar to the forging of other supra local communities.

Working from Andersonian premises, Sudipta Kaviraj argues that Indian nation is an 'imaginary institution' that came into existence as late as 19th century.[57] He clarifies that Indians did not become patriotic for the first time in the 19th century, but they 'invented' a new form of being patriotic and a new object to be patriotic for.[58]

Before a national consciousness emerges, there appears a certain inchoate anti-colonial political consciousness. This is a pessimistic outlook, a pessimism born out of a failure to find a social base for its dissatisfaction against colonialism. The hostility against colonialism is experienced from old, limited and fragmented identities of region, religion etc., all getting increasingly modernised though.[59]

Looking for a viable social basis to express anti-colonial sentiments, the dissatisfied bilingual intelligentsia especially in Bengal, imagined newer solidarities to begin with, along religious lines. However, the history and contemporary resources of the Bengalis appeared woefully inadequate for a task as daunting as taking on the British Empire. In such a situation, the anti-colonial

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[57] Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India", in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey eds., *Subaltern Studies* VII (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 1.

[58] Ibid., p. 30.

[59] Ibid., p. 12.

intellectuals broke down the boundaries of 'we' ness and extended it in all directions in a desperate experiment in coalition making until they imagined the Indian nation.[60]

In simple words, with the onset of modernity there emerges a bilingual intelligentsia which became dissatisfied with colonialism. This section first emerged in Bengal where colonial modernity had advanced the most. The native bilingual intelligentsia started conceiving themselves as belonging to an exclusive national community with a superior cultural heritage and autonomous from colonial influence. Such imaginations first occurred along regional lines, but since Bengali culture was not seen as putative enough, efforts were made to draw on the cultural riches of Marathas, Rajputs and Sikhs among others. Looking for a basis to forge an identity shared by these disparate peoples, the Bengali nationalists found Hinduism as the basis of a common Indian identity. A nation conceived in opposition to colonialism was projected as a different, coherent, eternally existing entity. This is the reason why early national imagining was exclusively along Hindu lines.[61] Nearly all 19th century conceptions of the Indian nation were along these lines.

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[60] Ibid., p. 16.
Also see Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bamkim Chandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 145-146.

[61] Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the structure of Nationalist Discourse", in T.V. Satyamurthy ed., *State and Nation in the Context of Social Change* (Delhi: Oxford Unversity Press, 1994), pp. 301-318.

Bankim Chandra, Vivian Derozio, Ram Mohun Roy, Vivekananda, all subscribed to aspects of the aforesaid idea.[62]

Nationalist imaginings had to compete with other forms of supra- local communities. This was one of the reasons why later on, a more inclusive and secular idea of the nation emerged. Still, the fact remains that anti-colonial nationalism by its very nature asserts civilizational/cultural alterity and exclusivity.

Partha Chatterjee argues that in India the logic of cultural nationalism did not go to the extent of rejecting western modernity. Rather the nationalist project aimed at the 'creation of a modern national culture which was nevertheless not western'.[63] This was done, Chatterjee suggests, by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains; an outer material realm and an inner spiritual realm. In the outer material realm, western modernity is not rejected but is admired and emulated, but in the inner realm, civilizational alterity of the nation is asserted and maintained.[64]

Continuing the same line of argument, Dipesh Chakrabarty points out that Indians sought to redeem their subjectivity by mobilizing within the "context of the modern institutions and

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[62]Javved Alam, *India: Living with Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 103-104. Also see Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Chapter.3.

[63] Partha Chatterjee, The *Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 6.

[64] Ibid., p. 6.

sometimes on behalf of modernising project of nationalism memories that were both anti-historical and anti modern".[65]

Sugatha Bose and Ayesha Jalal challenge Partha Chatterjee's views. They point out that the 'Bengal Model' of negotiating with modernity – based on distinguishing "our modernity from theirs" – was not the only model. Leading intellectuals in Bengal and outside enunciated their positions on religion and nation without rejecting western modernity altogether. Instead of revelling in their own traditions, Indian intellectuals in different regions selectively appropriated and adapted new currents from the metropolis and the word at large.[66]

Even if we concede that Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakraborty carry their argument too far, there is no denying – as already pointed out – that culturalism of an exclusive kind is a recurring theme in all at anti-colonial nationalisms. This is true even in the case of later secular nationalism. Coming back to an issue already addressed, the basic problem with difference seeking nationalism is that it turns its back on normative concerns of modernity. The search for a pure tradition or (as in the Indian case) the search for a 'national modernity' amounts to countenancing the

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[65] Dipesh Chakraborty, "Post Colonialism and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian Pasts'", in Ranajith Guha ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 284.

[66] Sugatha Bose and Ayesha Jalal *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 8, especially pp. 112, 122. Also see Ayesha Jalal, "South Asia", in *Encyclopedia of Nationalism, Vol. I.* (New York: Academic Press, 2001), pp. 737-756.

reactionary tendencies of revivalism and a loss of commitment to a modern, plural secular identity.

Tanika Sarkar[67] points out that Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, (1838-1894) regarded as the progenitor of modern Indian nationalism was, to begin with, a liberal reformer closely committed to the utilitarian philosophy. He was critical of the abuses within the traditional Indian society. In 1879 he authored an essay titled 'Samya' (egalitarianism) in which he offered a profound critique of the inherent hierarchies in Indian society, those of gender and caste among others. For him, society had to change before any political independence.

However, by the late 1880s Bankim Chandra had become a nationalist. Several factor played a role in it. The increasing lethargy of the Bengali Hindu middle class, modernization of the Muslim elite, rising peasant and tenant insurgencies and missionary attacks on Hindu religion were some of the factors which prompted Bankim's turn towards nationalism. Once he turned a nationalist, Bankim became extremely protective of Indian (which he saw as Hindu) traditions. In the 'inner spiritual realm' the autonomous national culture must prevail. He repudiated therefore, his own earlier work 'Samya'. For Bankim, the national project was to revitalize the Hindu

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[67] The discussion on Bankim is based on two articles by Tanika Sarkar. See Tanika Sarkar, "Bankim Chandra and the Impossibility of a Political Agenda", in *Hindu Wife and Hindu Nation: Community Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000), pp. 135-162. Also see Tanika Sarkar, "Imagining Hindu Rashtra: The Hindu and the Muslim in Bankim Chandra's Writings", in *Hindu Wife and Hindu Nation*, pp. 135-162.

nation. Hinduism must stop being an effeminate phenomenon and become an 'anushilan dharma', a religion of discipline. In the Hindu nation, which he envisaged, women would keep their traditional positions and national leadership would be the task of upper caste Hindu males. While rejecting colonial modernity in the 'inner spiritual' realm, he had no problems in a accepting it in the 'outer material' realm. Bankim Chandra's positions indicate the effect a discourse of nationalism has on the normative concerns of modernity.

The argument so far has been that nationalism with its concern to protect an autonomous national culture often becomes antithetical to the normative concerns of modernity. This becomes very clear when we look at the nationalist responses to the 'caste question'.

The caste system obviously is a retrograde and anti-modern institution. Seen as an essential part of Indian civilization/traditions, its existence was looked upon by the British as a reason why true national politics could never emerge in India. Further, caste system and its abuses provided British colonialism a ground for posing as an agent of modernity and civilization. Nationalism, keen as it was to protect and defend an exclusive national culture, could never accept attacks on the caste system, which was seen as an essential aspect of Indian culture. Colonial modernity therefore had to be kept away from focussing on the caste question.

Within the nationalist social imaginary, there were only two options available while dealing with the 'caste question'. One approach was to hold that caste being a cultural issue, part of the 'inner

spiritual realm', agencies of colonial modernity should keep their distance. The nation once it became independent would tackle it. This option did not rule out values of modernity informing a critique of caste but merely postponed it. The other approach was to hold that a renewed and revitalized caste system should be the basis on a truly Indian nation.[68]

Susan Bayly suggests that within the latter option there emerged three possibilities. The first view – 'incubus view' – held that a pure and true Indian tradition conceives a caste system devoid of all rigidities and consistent with modern values. The second position held that an idealised 'varna' order where individuals would take social positions on the basis of birth would create a perfect Hindu nation and would avoid the infirmities of caste as existed in 19th century India. This view saw caste system as a 'golden chain' that bound Indian civilization. Bayly designates it the 'golden chain view'. The third view saw local jati hierarchies of caste system as promoting an ethic suitable for a resurgent Indian nation. Bayly calls this the 'idealised corporation view'.[69]

The long and short of it is that nationalism becomes extremely protective of what it perceives as national culture. Anyone critiquing the traditions using the insights of modernity exposed themselves to

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[68] Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 232-235.Also p.294.

[69] Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India: Form the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2000), for the typology see page. 155.

the risk of being dubbed anti-national. Jyotiba Phule, E.V. 'Periyar' Ramswamy and Ambedkar, just to mention three names, took that risk and paid the price. The burdens of cultural nationalism are not fully shed even when a secular nation starts to be imagined. Cultural nationalism acts as a limiting factor in all anti-colonial thought.

Chapter 3

Gandhi And The Nationalist Resolution Of The Caste Question

Gandhi's position on the caste question was tied up with his attitude towards modernity. Gandhi had serious reservations about modernity and he tried to address its defects by creatively exploring Indian traditions. Gandhi tried to fashion out of Indian traditions, a national idea which was different from 'culturalist' or 'nationalist' ideas of nationalism. However, Gandhian nationalism, in looking towards Indian civilization/traditions as a basis for nationhood remained deeply ambivalent towards modernity. It could not come to terms with the urge for the normative dimensions of modernity among sections of the Indian population which were rendered underprivileged in traditional India.

Gandhi's Attitude towards Modernity

Gandhi's critique of modernity was not motivated by narrow nationalism or anticolonialism.[1] As Partha Chatterjee has pointed out, Gandhi's critique of modernity was not a critique of western culture or an attempt to establish that Indian culture or religion was superior. Gandhi's charge against the West was that by wholeheartedly

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[1] Anthony Parel, "Introduction", in Anthony Parel ed.,
Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. XVII.
While he was writing his most sustained critique of modernity, viz. *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi was very loyal to the British Empire. Gandhi wrote the *Hind Swaraj* on board a ship white returning to South Africa after Petitioning the British government in London on behalf of South African Indians.

embracing the dubious virtues of modern civilization, West had forgotten its essentially Christian heritage. [2] Gandhi Wrote:

> The people of Europe before they were touched by modern civilization had much in common with the people of the East; anyhow, the people of India and even today, Europeans who are not touched by modern civilization are far better able to mix with Indians than the off-springs of modern civilization.[3]

Gandhi's analysis of the problems of modernity was almost clinical. He was of the view that modern civilization treated individuals as isolated and sensuous entities. It was therefore a body centred and not a spirit centred civilization. Society was seen merely as an aggregation of individuals with particular interests. A body centred or materialistic view of man saw as legitimate, man's selfishness and his/her burgeoning wants. In its pursuit of sensory gratification, modern civilization, Gandhi felt, became exploitative. For Gandhi, colonialism/imperialism was a direct outcome of the logic of modernity.[4]

Gandhi felt that modernity exalted reason and saw individuals endowed with reason as autonomous. Since individuals were seen as autonomous and capable of developing their own ideas of 'good life', all shared ideas about the 'good life' were given up in a modern society. Such a society was, for Gandhi, devoid of ultimate values

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[2] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* ? (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 93.

[3] "Gandhi's Letter to Polak", in Anthony Parel ed.,*Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p. 122.

[4] For Gandhi's critique of modernity see Bhiku Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination* (London : Macmillan Press, 1989), pp. 11-32;
Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Chapter 4 and Anthony Parel ed., *Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*.

including those of religion, which told individuals what to do and what not to do. Morality became private. In the public sphere, there remained merely a procedural ethic which respected the inviolability of individuals. Further, the state was entitled to the use of force to preserve the private sphere of individuals.[5]

Modernity, Gandhi felt, although premised on individualism actually dehumanised man. For Gandhi, man was not merely a passive consumer but an active moral being whose self respect, dignity, and right to work were far more important than gratification of trivial wants.[6] So also, in the absence of ultimate values, society as a whole, lacked direction, and a source of internal criticism. As Gandhi put it, "(Modern) civilization takes note neither of morality nor religion."[7] Elsewhere he wrote:

> The predominant character of modern civilization is exploitation of the weaker races of the Earth. The predominant character of modern civilization is to dethrone God and to enthrone materialism. I have not hesitated to call this system of government under which we are labouring; 'satanic' and I withdraw not one word from it.[8]

For Gandhi, a true civilization was one which helped human beings realise their true nature, their humanity. Civilization must show the individual his/her duty. It must also give ultimate values for society as a whole against which individual and social conduct could

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[5] Thomas Pantham, "Gandhi's Intervention in Modern Moral Political Discourse", in Ramashray Roy ed., *Gandhi and the Present Global Crisis* (Shimla : Indian Institute Advanced Study, 1996), pp. 57-74. Also see Thomas Pantham, "Gandhi Nehru and Modernity", in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh eds.., *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995).

[6] Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 22.

[7] Anthony Parel ed.,*Gandhi:Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p. 37.

[8] Raghavan N. Iyer ed., *Political and Moral Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Vol.1, p. 345.

be judged. In the *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi wrote: "Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over passions."[9] What Gandhi was pleading for, was a morality based on shared ultimate values. In the words of Thomas Pantham, Gandhi stood for an "ontological, hermeneutical, historical, contextual" morality as opposed to the deontological ethic of modernity.[10]

For Gandhi human nature was not sensual:

> I learn that the law of the beast is not the law of man; that man has by painful striving to surmount and survive the animal in him and from the tragedy of 'himsa' being enacted around him, he has to learn the supreme lesson of 'ahimsa' for himself. Man must, therefore, if he is to realize his dignity and his own mission learn to take part in the destruction and refuse to prey upon his weaker fellow creatures.[11]

So in the place of modern civilization Gandhi wanted an alternative civilization which respected man's true nature. It should be a civilization based on the ultimate values of truth and non violence. Gandhi in one sense was not so much rejecting 'modern liberal democratic' civilization as trying to redeem its central value viz., the affirmation of individual freedom. For Gandhi, real freedom was not the pursuit of material wants but the assertion of one's true nature. This would be possible only in a social order conducive to morality.

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[9] Anthony Parel ed.,*Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings,* p. 67.
[10] Thomas Pantham, "Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi : Beyond Liberal Democracy," in Thomas Pantham and Kenneth Deutsch eds., *Political Thought in Modern India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1986), pp. 325-346. also see Thomas Pantham, "Gandhi's Intervention in Modern Moral and Political Discourse," in Ramashray Roy ed., *Gandhi and the Present Moral Crisis* (Shimla : IIAS, 1996), pp. 57-74.
[11] Raghavan N. Iyer ed., *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Vol. 2, p. 24.

The modern world, according to Gandhi, was hardly conducive to morality.

Gandhi and the Return to Traditions

In Gandhi's Writings we can see a fierce attachment to Indian civilization and traditions. At one level, such an attachment can be explained in terms of Gandhi's critique of modernity. He saw in Indian civilization/traditions, a world view informed by ultimate values which could help individuals realize true 'swaraj' (self rule).

Gandhi felt that Indian civilization had developed a proper theory of man which enabled it to determine the objectives and limits of human activities and to assign them their legitimate place in life. For Gandhi, ancient Indians knew that mind and body were seats of temptations and therefore directed these in such a way that the essential humanity was not sacrificed.[12] But they did not ignore the legitimate demands of body; rather bodily demands were located within the larger framework of and regulated by the moral and spiritual nature of man. The theory of the four 'purusharthas' sanctioned the pursuit of 'artha' and 'kama' provided they were guided by 'dharma'. Indian social life, therefore, could claim a balanced structure.[13]

Gandhi was very forthright in the *Hind Swaraj*: "The tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, which of the western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is Godless; the

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[12] Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 38.
[13] Ibid., p. 38.

former is based on a belief in God. It behoves every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilization even as a child clings to its mother's breast."[14] Elsewhere Gandhi wrote:

> The European Civilization is satanic. An obvious proof of this is the fierce war that is going on at present. This should be a warning to us and we should remember that our sages have given us the immutable and inviolate principle that our conduct be godly and that it be rooted in 'dharma'. We should follow these principles alone. Truth and non violence are our goals. Non violence is the supreme dharma....If we can ensure the deliverance of India, it is only through truth and non violence. [15]

Gandhi thought that India's lack of material advancement was a proof of her moral advancement:

> Indian civilization saw that happiness was a mental condition.... Hence it dissuades us from luxuries and pleasures....Cottages; implements have all remained unchanged in India. There is no life corroding competition. Each follows his own occupation or trade. Not that Indians could not invent machinery, but did not as they did not want to become slaves and lose their moral fibre. Civilization was avoided as a snare and a useless encumbrance.[16]

But Gandhi's return to Indian tradition was not merely due to moral reasons; it had a cultural logic as well. Gandhi suggested that if only India could come out of its fascination for Western civilization, it would become free.[17] "We shall", Gandhi wrote, "get our freedom through the way in which we live our lives. Freedom cannot be had for the asking. We can never gain it through copying Europe." [18]

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[14] Anthony Parel ed., *Gandhi:Hind Swaraj and Other Writings,* p. 71.
[15] Raghawan N. Iyer ed., *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi,* Vol. 1, p. 303.
[16] Anthony Parel ed.,*Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings,* pp. 68-69.
[17] Ibid., p. 72.
[18] Raghavan N. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi,*Vol. 1, p. 303.

Ashis Nandy has pointed out that colonialism works by creating an ideology of difference between the colonizer and the colonized. So anti-colonial resistance takes the form of asserting one's culture but the spirit in which it is asserted often betrays the influence of the culture of the colonizer. Indian traditionalists like Tilak, Dayananda, Vivekananda, among others, followed this line and 'semiticised' and 'masculinised' Indian traditions. Gandhi on the other hand, while being attached to Indian traditions much like his predecessors, took pride in the fact that Indian culture was not just different from the West in its appearance but also in its spirit. By refusing to play along the lines of the dichotomies constructed by colonial ideology, Gandhi offered a better cultural resistance to colonialism.[19]

Gandhi's Ambivalence towards Modernity.

Gandhi's return to tradition raises the question whether he rejected modernity altogether including its normative dimensions. Gandhi scholars are nearly united in affirming that Gandhi was no revivalist. In the *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi acknowledged that Indian civilization was not perfect. He suggested that the positive contributions of colonialism could be used to improve it: "We may use the new spirit that is born in us for purging us of our evils."[20]

Parekh[21]points to features of modernity that made a deep impression on Gandhi. Firstly, Gandhi was impressed by modernity's constant search for truth. He however, felt that modernity ended up

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[19] Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 19-28 and 48-62.
[20] Anthony Parel ed., *Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, p. 71.
[21] Bhikhu Parekh,*Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp. 31-32.

fetishing reason. Secondly, he appreciated modernity's conquest over nature and the resulting benefits for mankind. But modernity, he felt, lacked a proper theory of man to come to terms with its triumph over nature. Finally, Gandhi held in deep respect the organizational side of modern life: civic virtue, respect for rules, public morality, punctuality and sacrifice of personal interests for collective interests. He however, feared that conscientious objection and dissent had no place in modern organizational life.

Gandhi was open to the values of modernity like equality, liberty and autonomy: "In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. I believe in the inherent equality of man and I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves."[22]

At the same time Gandhi had little regard for an abstract universal modernity. This is what he has to say in the *Hind Swaraj*:

> I am not pleading for the continuance of religions superstitions. We will certainly fight them tooth and nail, but we can never do so by disregarding religion. We can do so only by appreciating and conserving the latter.[23]

Rudolph and Rudolph[24] suggest that Gandhi successfully blended modern values into a traditional idiom. Faced with the criticism that Indians were a feminine lot and lacked courage, Gandhi evolved a new political style, drawing on India's supposedly feminine traditions. He

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[22] M.K. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, 100 Vols.(Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of information and Broadcasting, 1958-84), Vol. 35, p. 1.
[23] Anthony Parel ed., *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, pp. 43-44.
[24] Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1987).

came up with political methods such as 'satyagraha', which were based on what Rudolphs call a 'new courage' as opposed to the hyper masculine notion of courage espoused by modernity.

Again Gandhi's reformism was couched in a traditional idiom of saintly asceticism which made it acceptable. Unlike his political predecessors, Gandhi leavened traditional symbolism with reformist ideas.[25]

Throughout his life, Gandhi cultivated the very modern value of 'this worldly asceticism'- economizing of time, optimum use of resources, frugality etc. Weber identified 'this worldly asceticism' as the central element in the emergence of modernity. This was quite alien to Indian public life. Gandhi however, constantly strove to institutionalize it; for instance, through the reorganization of the Congress party.[26]

Rudolphs point out that Gandhi was deeply attached to the modern notion of 'public ethic', i.e. commitments to values, to persons and to institutions which are not affective commitments. By describing in his writings – not least in his *An Autobiography* – the many instances where his affective and public loyalties clashed, Gandhi made his attachment to a 'public ethic', part of the Gandhian lore and eased its acceptance by the wider public.[27]

If Gandhi was so much attached to some of the values of modernity, the question arises as to why he did not embrace it

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[25] Ibid., p. 35.
[26] Ibid., pp. 62-86.
[27] Ibid., pp. 96-92.

wholeheartedly. In previous sections of this chapter it was suggested that it could be due to some of the grave problems in modernity itself. But beyond that, an explanation of Gandhi's ambiguity towards modernity must be sought in his positive estimation of tradition.

Gandhi refused to countenance the view that modernity embodies values that are universal and which transcend cultural particularities.[28]

For Gandhi, every community struggles with perennial problems of existence and over centuries develops a set of ideas and institutions most suited to it, a set of traditions. For a person born into a tradition, it serves as his/her 'cultural capital', a resource with which to negotiate the world. He felt that rejecting out of hand traditions was foolhardy. While being rooted in ones traditions, individuals could always accommodate insights from other traditions. Gandhi therefore, had little respect for abstract universalism based on Enlightenment modernity. Gandhi was closer to an alternative conception of universalism based on the fusion of particular civilizational horizons.[29]

Though Gandhi valued tradition, he accepted that traditions could get corrupted. But he also held that all traditions contained central values which were valid eternally.[30]

Gandhi felt that Indian traditions needed to be revitalized for it to survive in a modern era. Gandhi was clearly dissatisfied with Indian

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[28] Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi: Sage, 1989), p. 25.
[29] Ibid., p. 25.
[30] Ibid., p. 25.

culture/civilization as it existed. A rather long quotation from Gandhi will reveal the extent of his dismay:

> What are our failings then because which we are helpless? How is it that the mighty Sir Michael O'Dwyer and insolent general Dyer can crush us like bugs? The reason is our inveterate selfishness, our inability to make sacrifices for the country, our dishonesty, our timidity, our hypocrisy, our ignorance. Everybody is selfish, more or less, but we seem to be more selfish than others. We make some self sacrifice in family matters, but very little of it for national work....Hence so long as we have not given up our selfishness and learnt to be mindful of the interests of others, have not learnt self sacrifice, have not taken refuge in truth, eschewed fear and become brave, shed hypocrisy and banished ignorance the country will not prosper in any real sense.[31]

It is quite clear from this account that Gandhi wanted to blend aspects of modernity with Indian tradition. But he did not want to give up tradition altogether. That would be like throwing away the baby with the bathwater. His strategy was of 'critical traditionalism'. Tradition should be revitalized by critically teasing out and adopting central insights of modernity while rejecting its ill suited forms.[32]

In a way, Gandhi took upon himself the task of giving India a morality appropriate to the modern age, a 'yugadharma' for the modern age.[33] Anthony Parel describes Gandhi's endeavour as an attempt to give India a 'redefined dharma'.[34]

Ronald Terchek's analysis is very helpful in understanding Gandhi's complex attitudes towards modernity and tradition. He argues that Gandhi's basic commitment was to the idea of 'individual

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[31] Raghavan N. Iyer ed., *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi,* Vol. 1, pp. 301-309.
[32] Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform,* pp. 108-109.
[33] Ibid., p. 15.
[34] Anthony Parel, "Introduction" in Anthony Parel ed., *Gandhi; Hind Swaraj and Other Writings,* p. XVI.

autonomy'. This is a modern value. But Gandhi felt that individual autonomy was not possible in the real sense in the mindlessly materialist modern world. Gandhi tried to show that in a traditional civilization, individual autonomy was possible. However, those aspects of the traditional order, which hampered individual autonomy, should be smashed. In other words, only a revitalized tradition could allow individual autonomy. This explains Gandhi's total commitment to it.[35]

Thomas Pantham points out that Gandhi did not resort to the usual relativist arguments, ('our culture is different, so are our values; so we need none of your civilizing modernity' – kind of arguments) used by emancipatory thinkers.[36]

Ashis Nandy makes a similar point. Gandhi, says Nandy, reformulated modern world in traditional terms to make the crisis of modern times meaningful for the traditional society. He updated Indian culture, giving it a sharper, more contemporary sense of evil and making it a holistic alternative to modernity.[37]

Gandhi's idea of nationalism

Since Gandhi's critique of the West was essentially moral, Partha Chatterjee[38] has argued that Gandhi was outside the discourse of nationalism. Gandhi claimed no cultural exclusivity for India as nationalists often did.

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[35] Ronald Terchek, *Gandhi: Struggling for Autonomy* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publishing, 1999), Chapter 1.
[36] Thomas Pantham, "Post Relativism in Emancipatory Thought: Gandhi's Swaraj and Satyagraha," in D.L. Sheth and Ashis Nandy eds., *Mutiverse of Democracy* (New Delhi : Sage, 1996).
[37] Ashis Nandy, "From outside the Imperium: Gandhi's Cultural Critique of the West," in *Tradition, Tyranny and Utopias* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[38] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World*, p. 100.

However, Gandhi's treatment of nationalism, especially in the all important text *Hind Swaraj*, shows that Gandhi did espouse a 'nationalist' or 'culturalist' idea of nationalism.

For Gandhi, Indian nation was not the product of colonial modernity or colonial civil society. "Nations", Gandhi wrote, "are not formed in a day, formation requires years."[39] Gandhi was insistent that Congress did not create the Indian nation, it merely demanded home rule.[40] Similarly, Gandhi dismissed the idea that railways or western education (aspects of colonial modernity) created the national idea in India:

> We were one nation before the British came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that the British could establish one Kingdom.[41]

For Gandhi, India was a nation because of her civilizational integrity which had existed even from pre-Islamic times. A common language, pilgrimage sites in various corners of India, all, for Gandhi, were means of creating national feeling used by ancient Indians. Gandhi saw the 'Acharyas' of the past as the main forces behind the creation of the Indian nation. He asserted that railways far from uniting India, made people aware of the numerous distinctions among them.[42]

Gandhi was dismissive of the claims made on behalf of western education: "By receiving English education, we have enslaved the

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[39] Anthony Parel ed., *Gandhi: Hind Sawraj and other Writings*, p. 20.
[40] Ibid., Chapter 1.
[41] Ibid., p. 48.
[42] Ibid., p. 49.

nation. It is we, the English knowing Indians, who have enslaved India. The curse upon the nation will not just be upon the British but upon us."[43]

By rejecting the role of modernity in the creation of the Indian nation and by asserting that the basis of Indian nationality is the ancient Indian civilization, Gandhi falls decidedly into the primordialist camp of nationalists.

Gandhi made the point that although Indian nation embodied a civilization, religious plurality was not a threat to it. This was so because the nature of Indian civilization, as Gandhi saw it, was essentially open and accommodating.[44] "There are many religions in India but religion is not synonymous with nationality."[45] However, by seeing Indian nationhood as being based on a civilization which was pre-Islamic wherein others had to be 'accommodated', Gandhi left his readers in little doubt that his nationalism was Hindu nationalism of a kind.

In basing Indian nationality on Indian civilization, Gandhi avoided the usual exclusiveness or narrow mindedness of culturalist nationalism. Yet a certain exclusivity was inevitable.

Gandhi saw Indian heritage and civilization as largely Hindu. He did not think too highly of Muslim rule except the rule of Akbar. Equality, he felt was Islam's greatest contribution to India. His Writings and speeches had little reference to Muslim politics, art,

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[43] Ibid., Chapter 18.
[44] Ibid., Chapter 10.
[45] Ibid., p. 52.

architecture or saints. And if his reading of Koran were to be excluded, it was difficult to infer from his life, dress, manner of conversation that he saw himself as an heir to centuries of Muslim presence in India. The rich Muslim culture, which meant so much to Nehru and many other national leaders, evoked no sympathetic echo in him.[46]

Gandhi saw Indian history as Hindu, which had been disturbed by the aberrations of Muslim and British rule. He did not suggest that Hinduism was the basis of Indian unity. He recognized India as plural. However, when it came to the nature of the synthesis and manner of co-existence, He fell back on Hinduism. Indian pluralism and cultural synthesis were seen as uniquely Hindu achievements, tributes to Hindu tolerance.[47] Gandhi did concede a lot of space for Muslims in India. However, it was a place within a Hindu framework. Muslim or other religious or cultural minorities were not seen as an indispensable component of Indian identity.[48]

Gandhi tried to differentiate his understanding of nationalism from narrow, exclusive, chauvinistic nationalisms. His alternative to narrow alterist nationalism was not an abstract universalism based on Enlightenment values. Rather he felt that various traditional civilizations embodied in nations could co-exist and learn from each other.[49]

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[46] Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 188.
[47] Ibid., p. 189.
[48] Ibid., p. 190.
[49] Ashis Nandy, *Illegitimacy of Nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. X-XI.

In Gandhi's corpus we can find a number of instances where he tries to distinguish his civilizational idea of nationalism from a 'nationalist' or 'culturalist' idea of nationalism. "Indian nationalism", wrote Gandhi, "is not exclusive but conservative. It is not anti foreigner but pro India by necessity....Non-violent nationalism is a condition of corporate or civilized life."[50] Gandhi insisted that "my nationalism is intense internationalism. I am sick of the strife between nations."[51] On another occasion he wrote:

> Let us understand what nationalism we want for our country. We do not want suffering for other countries....My love, therefore of nationalism, or my idea of nationalism is that my country may become free...so that human race may live. There is no room here for race hatred. Let that be our nationalism. [52]

Gandhi tried to conceive a qualitatively different kind of nationalism. A nation based on an inclusive civilization, he felt would be at peace with itself and an asset to the common heritage of humanity. However Gandhi's understanding of Indian civilization was rather monolithic. He overlooked some of its weakness and hence could not appreciate or understand the abiding interest in modernity and modern (an opposed to cultural) nationalism on the part of large sections of Indians.

Gandhi and the caste question

Given Gandhi's ambiguous stance towards modernity and his efforts to fashion a different kind of nationalism out of Indian

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[50] CWMG, Vol. 25, p. 368.
[51] CWMG, Vol. 32, p. 45.
[52] Raghavan N. Iyer ed., *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 1, p. 347.

traditions/civilization, he was reluctant to accept the modernist critique of caste. From a 'critical traditionalist' perspective, he tried to redeem what he felt to be desirable features of the traditional (caste) society.

Since Gandhi was open to some of the insights of modernity, he had little difficulty in recognizing untouchability as morally repugnant. One can find copious instances of Gandhi's anguished outbursts against untouchability in his writings. He described it at various times as a 'curse', 'an excrescence on Hinduism', 'a poison', 'a snake', 'a canker', 'a hydra headed monster', 'a great blot', 'a device of Satan', 'hideous untruth' etc.[53] However, Gandhi insisted that untouchability was merely an aberration of caste society rather than its essence. A reformulated or revitalized caste society was an ideal Gandhi cherished.

Gandhi tried to show that untouchability had no place in Hindu/Indian traditions. He argued that merely because references could be found in the scriptures in defense of untouchability did not make the institution sacrosanct. Gandhi insisted that scriptures which could not stand the test of reason and conscience were not worthy of respect:

> "To believe in everything which is supposed to be stated in the *Vedas* without using our reason, without discriminating between essential and inessential and trying to determine the meaning of the text – this is idol worship."[54]

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[53] Élanor Zelliot, "Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership," in *From Untouchable to Dalit:Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (Delhi: Manohar, 1992), p. 154.

[54] CWMG, Vol., 27, p.20.

On another occasion, he had this to say about *Manusmriti*:

> "Take *Manusmriti*. I do not know which of its verses are genuine and which are interpolations. But there are quite a few which cannot be defended as religion. We must reject such verses."[55]

Another strategy that Gandhi employed to question untouchability from within tradition was to insist that even if references could be found in support of untouchability in scriptures, such references did not count, as they did not fit in with the spirit of the religion as a whole:

> "I count myself a Sanatani – they alone deserve to be called a Sanatani who have the spirit of Hindusim in every fibre of their being. The revered Shankara summarised that spirit in one sentence: 'Brahma satyam jagat mitya'. Another sage declared that there is no dharma higher than truth, and still another that Hinduism means perfect non-violence. You may accept anyone of these three statements and you will find the essence of Hinduism."[56]

In other words, the spirit of Hinduism did not support untouchability though specific scriptures might.

Gandhi also tried to show that Hinduism was a religion which should not place undue emphasis on scriptures:

> Hinduism is a living organism....It is not based on scriptures. The Shastras are ever growing. The *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Smritis*, *Puranas*, *Itihas* did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods and therefore they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate eternal truths but show how these were produced at the time.[57]

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[55] CWMG, Vol.31, p.158.
[56] CWMG, Vol.26, p.131.
[57] CWMG, Vol.29, p.443.

All these show that Gandhi had mechanisms to oppose from within tradition, practices he found reprehensible therein. He did not need the outside standards of modernity.[58]

However, as has been already pointed out, Gandhi was unwilling to throw away tradition as such. In all his different positions on caste, he stood by an idealized view of caste. A brief overview of Gandhi's different positions on the caste question is in order.

Soon after his return to India from South Africa, Gandhi took the position that caste system was acceptable and part of Indian traditions, though not untouchability. He started using the expression 'varnashramadharma' only in the mid 1920s.

This is what he had to say on the issue in 1916:

> The Hindu social structure has endured on the caste system.... As a result of its existence, Indian society has not needed laws. Caste system contains within it the seeds of 'swaraj'. The different castes are like so many divisions of an army. The general does not know the soldiers individually but gets them to work through captains. In like manner we can carry out social reform with ease through the agency of caste system. Caste system is a perfectly natural institution. It is invested with a religious significance. Its utility is obvious. I am opposed to movements being carried on for the destruction of caste system. Eating and marriage restriction are on the whole welcome.[59]

Soon enough, Gandhi began to see that caste system as it existed hardly corresponded to his views. He now took the position that, "caste is a hindrance, not a sin. But untouchability is a sin, a

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[58] Gandhi's critique of untouchability from within tradition did not convince too many of the orthodox. Gandhi used many of the arguments stated in the text to persuade Namboodiri priests of Vaikom to give in to the demand of lower caste protestors who were claiming the right to use access roads to the temple of Vaikom in Travancore state. Gandhi who came to the state to support the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-1925) failed in his mission. The priests remained unconvinced.

[59] CWMG, Vol. 13, pp. 301-302.

great crime and if Hinduism does not destroy this serpent while there is time yet, it will get destroyed."[60]

He started thinking in terms of a reformulated caste system:

> I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four fold division alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner they fuse the better.[61]

Gandhi actually suggested ways to reduce the number of sub-castes in an effort at reformulation. He suggested that those sub-castes, which ate together, must intermarry. At the same time, he cautioned that untouchability removal must not be mixed up with less pressing matters such as interdining and intermarriage.[62]

By the mid 1920s, Gandhi started talking explicitly in terms of 'varnashramadharma': "I believe in Varnashramadharma both according to birth and karma."[63] In the same vein, Gandhi said:

> I do not believe in caste system as it is at present constituted, but I do believe in the four fundamental division regulated according to the four principal occupations. The existing innumerable castes with the attendant artificial restrictions and elaborate ceremonial are harmful to the growth of a religious spirit, as also the social well being of the Hindus. [64]

Gandhi eventually came to clearly distinguish between 'caste', 'varna' and 'untouchability'. Speaking at a public meeting on October 4 1927, this is what he had to say:

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[60] CWMG, Vol. 14, p.73.
[61] CWMG, Vol. 18. p.83.
[62] CWMG, Vol. 23, p.465 and Vol. 24, p.34.
[63] CWMG, Vol.25, p.511.
[64] CWMG, Vol. 30, p.407.

> I draw the sharpest distinction between 'varnashrama' and caste. Untouchability I hold to be an unpardonable sin and a great blot on Hinduism. Caste, I hold to be a great obstacle to our progress and an arrogant assumption of superiority by one group over another, and Untouchability is its most extreme example. It is high time we got rid of the taint of untouchability and the taint of caste. Let us not degrade 'varnashrama' by mixing up with it caste or untouchability. Varna has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. It simply means that one must conserve the good qualities of ones ancestors and that each should follow the profession of the father as long as the profession is not immoral.[65]

By the mid 1930s, Gandhi actually gave up any defense of caste and confined his advocacy to 'varna' alone. In an article entitled 'Caste has to go' written in 1935, he wrote:

> I believe in 'varnashrama' of the Vedas which in my opinion is based on equality of status, notwithstanding passages to the contrary in the Smritis and elsewhere.... The 'varnashrama' of the shastras is today non existent in practice. The present caste system is the very antithesis of 'varnashrama'. The sooner public opinion abolishes it, the better. [66]

Later on Gandhi made slight amendments to his position and advocated compulsory intercaste marriage among other things.[67] But on the whole his position on caste had reached its maturity by the mid 1930s and thereafter changed only cosmetically.

Gandhi saw some benefits in the traditional institution of caste system/'varnashramadharma'. To begin with, he felt that the idea of traditional occupation avoided unnecessary competition in society; further traditional caste occupations often suited a person's natural abilities and dispositions. The norms of caste society, Gandhi felt, created self-restraint and developed powers of self discipline. Since

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[65] Ibid., Vol. 35, pp.79-82.
[66] CWMG, Vol. 62, p.121.
[67] For Gandhi's later positions on Caste see, Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi* (New Delhi: Viking : 1995), pp. 261-64.

caste society functioned on its own, it would keep the coercive state away. Gandhi felt that the institution of caste had kept Indian society together in times foreign rule and preserved its religious and cultural traditions. Caste system provided a network of emotional and moral support and provided a safeguard against anomie and disintegration.[68]

Gandhi's whole approach, Judith Brown points out, was to put an ultimate vision of purified four-fold caste order before Hindus, but in practice not to force the pace and stir up feelings on issues which were minor when compared to untouchability.[69]

What is wrong with Gandhi's Position on Caste?

The position Gandhi gave to the so called Untouchables in the reformulated 'varna' order that he envisaged had nothing in it to enthuse the Untouchables. Gandhi was adamant that everyone should follow their ancestral vocations: "The law of 'varna' prescribes that a person should for his living, follow the lawful occupation of his forefathers." However, all occupations were to be deemed equally hounarable: "A scavenger has the same status as the Brahman."[70] All 'varnas' in Gandhi's scheme possessed equality of status but not equality of opportunity. "One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger and then do whatever he likes. For, a

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[68] Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, p.249.
[69] Judith Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1989), p.208.
[70] Young India, 17 Novemeber 1927, quoted by Elanor Zelliot, in "Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership", p.154.

scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or president. That according to me is Hinduism."[71]

In Gandhi's efforts to do away with untouchability, he denied Untouchables any agency. For Gandhi, untouchability was merely a problem in Hinduism. Its solution lay in Caste Hindus – perpetrators of the sin of untouchability in Gandhi's view, atoning for it. Untouchables would be mere passive recipients of Caste Hindu beneficence. Independent political mobilization by Untouchables for a modern regime of rights was unacceptable to Gandhi. Such an endeavour would, in Gandhi's view, break Hindu/national solidarity.

All these issues came to the fore in the debate surrounding the demand for 'separate electorates' for Untouchables.

At the Second Round table Conference (1931) in London where both Gandhi and Ambedkar were delegates, the latter demanded separate electorate for Untouchables. Gandhi openly clashed with Dr. Ambedkar. Gandhi opposed the proposal on the ground that it would permanently divide the Hindu community and would result in Untouchables living permanently with a stigma.

At a session of the Minorities Committee during the Second Round Table Conference, this was what Gandhi had to say:

> Congress will always accept any solution that may be acceptable to Hindus, the Mohammedans and the Sikhs. Congress will be no party to special reservations or special electorates for any minorities. I can understand the claim advanced by other minorities, but the claim advanced on behalf

[71] Harijan, 6 March 1937, quoted by Elanor Zelliot, in "Gandhi and Ambedkar : A Study in Leadership", p. 154.

> of the Untouchables, that to me is the 'unkindest cut of all'. It means perpetual bar-sinister.[72]

He further said:

> I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of Untouchables. Separate electorates and separate reservation is not the way to remove the bar sinister, which is the shame not of them, but of orthodox Hinduism. There is a body of Hindu reformers who are pledged to remove the blot of untouchability. Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity, so may Mohammedans, so may Europeans. Will the Untouchables remain Untouchables in perpetuity....Those who speak of the political rights of the Untouchables do not know India, do not know, how Indian society is structured....I would resist the proposal with my life. [73]

On the sidelines of the Second Round Table Conference, Gandhi spoke to the Indian 'Majlis' in Cambridge on the caste issue:

> It is the superior class of Hindus who have to do penance for having neglected the Untouchables for ages. That penance can be done by active social reform and by making the lot of the Untouchables better by acts of service, and not by asking for separate electorate for them. By giving them separate electorates, you will throw the apple of discord between the Untouchables and orthodox.[74]

When the government of Sir Ramsay McDonald announced the Communal Award in 1932 giving the Depressed Classes a double vote, one in special (separate) constituencies for a modest number of reserved seats and another in the general constituencies, Gandhi's response was to begin a 'fast unto death' on 20 September 1932, to reverse the award. As a result of the fast, he managed to persuade Untouchable leaders like Ambedkar, to settle for a scheme of reserved

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[72] CWMG, Vol. 48, p.297.
[73] CWMG, Vol. 48. p.298.
[74] Ibid., 233.

seats for Depressed Classes with a general electorate instead of separate electorates. The government later accepted the scheme.[75]

Following the 'Poona Pact' (1932) – as Gandhi's deal with Untouchable leaders came to be known – Gandhi became very active in untouchability removal. He coined the expression 'Harijan' to describe Untouchables; formed the organization 'Harijan Sevak Samaj' for the cause of Harijan uplift; undertook 'Harijan tours' to sensitise people of the evil of untouchability; observed a 21 day fast as an act of atonement for the sin of untouchability and not the least, founded the journal *'Harijan'*.

However, as Susan Bayly points out, Harijan Sevak Samaj – the central institution for fighting untouchability was deeply ambivalent in its understanding of untouchability. It was open only to Caste Hindus. The task of its members was to instill habits of cleanliness and propriety in their Untouchable beneficiaries, wean them away from what were perceived as unclean ways, occupations and sexual indulgences. [76]

Gandhi's central message, therefore, was that Untouchables could be redeemed only through a change in their way of life. However unjustly treated, the Untouchable should be an unworldly lover of God and nation, selflessly setting aside concerns of revenge and

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[75] See Elanor Zelliot, "Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership", p.166-168.
[76] Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Delhi : Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.250.

personal advancement in the higher cause of Hindu unity and national redemption.[77]

Conclusion

As pointed out in the last chapter, when confronted with colonial modernity, the nationalist strategy was to accept it in the 'outer, material realm' while rejecting it in the 'inner spiritual realm,' with the latter being seen as the sovereign national cultural sphere.[78] Gandhi, though not a copy book nationalist, was not above this strategy. For him caste was part of the inner spiritual national realm. The preying eyes of modernity had to be kept away from it. In the process he overlooked or insufficiently addressed retrograde practices in the 'national spiritual realm'.

Gandhi addressed the issue of caste, but only perfunctorily. His nationalism would not let him do anything more. G. Aloysius[79] very perceptively points out that Gandhi's views on caste revolved around the narrow spectrum of untouchability, interdining and intermarriage. However, these issues were marginal to the existential struggles of lower caste masses. Their agenda was to escape the humiliating ascriptive social identity by diversifying occupations and assuming a new anonymity of membership within larger society through competition and achievement. Gandhi was set against this and labeling these aspirations of the masses as 'non-indigenous',

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[77] Ibid, p.250.
[78] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1995), p.7.
[79] G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.209-210.

'materialist' and 'western' was an ideological weapon liberally and often successfully used as part and parcel of nationalist thought resource.

Chapter 4

Nehru and the Evasion of the Caste Question

Jawaharlal Nehru was at the centre of India's anti-colonial national movement and he oversaw the transition of India from a colony to a post- colonial nation state. He was the most outstanding figure in the firmament of Indian nationalism. Nehru's reputation now is mostly as a modernizer. Therefore any analysis of the interplay between nationalism and modernity cannot overlook Jawaharlal Nehru and his views. As with Gandhi, Nehru's position on social issues – not least on caste question – emerged out of the crucible of his views on modernity and nationalism. Nehru's position on social issues varied sharply from that of Gandhi, though. In this chapter, I shall try to show that Nehru's modernist convictions did not stop him from being a 'culturalist' and 'primordialist' in his nationalism. As a result, his views on the caste question show certain ambivalence, not expected in a modernist. However, once the anti-colonial struggle got over, Nehru's modernity got the better of his 'culturalist' nationalism. This, in turn, resulted in changes in his position on caste.

Nehru and Modernity

It is axiomatic to regard Nehru as a modernizer par excellence, India's 'Ataturk', almost. In chapter 2, an account was given of what modernity/ modernization implies. Even then it is not out of place to point out that modernization at an ideal-typical level involves the replacement of substantive (culturally rooted) rationality by formal rationality; the replacement of the idea that individuals are part of a

cosmic order by the assumption that individuals are unencumbered selves; the replacement of collective, communitarian, affective, spiritual orientations by individualistic, calculative, contractarian values and finally, the replacement of an undifferentiated value system by separate spheres of morality, art and science.[1]

The point that Nehru was a modernizer has been laboured by several scholars. Ashis Nandy in his critique of Nehruvian secularism writes:

> Nehru was scientific and rationally minded.... He always made modern Indians a little ashamed of their religious beliefs and ethnic origins and convinced them that he himself [alone] had the courage and rationality to neither believe in public nor private. By common consent of the Indian middle classes, Nehru provided the perfect role model for 20th century citizens of the flawed cultural reality called India. [2]

Partha Chatterji in his well-known indictment of Nehru, holds that popular enthusiasm evoked by Gandhi's fierce critique of modernity was virtually hijacked by Nehru and his ilk. Political independence so gained was not used for a fundamental transformation of society along Gandhian lines. Instead, deeply distrustful of the irrational masses, Nehru subsumed popular, anti-

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[1] Thomas Pantham, "Gandhi, Nehru and Modernity", in Upendra Baxi and Bhiku Parekh eds., *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995), p. 98.

[2] Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance", in Rajeev Bhargava ed., *Secularism and its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.328.

modern nationalism in a distant, unresponsive and strong state, which sought to impose modernity from above.[3]

However, the Nehru that emerges from his own writings is a far more nuanced, subtle and sophisticated figure; not an advocate of an acultural, rootless modernity.

Nehru had a unilineal conception of history. He felt that India was not in tune with the progress of universal history. His project was to integrate India with the 'spirit of the age' – 'the zeitgeist': "We have to function in line with the highest ideals of the age we live in. Those ideals may be classified under two heads: humanism and scientific spirit." [4]

Nehru argues that, to begin with, India was very much in tune with the logic of universal history. India lost out due to the decay of its social structure. He argues that there existed in Indian society till about eighth century A.D., a creative tension between the collectivism of the social structure and the extreme individualism of religions. Such a tension was conducive to spirit of enquiry, adventure and change. But soon this vitality was lost due to 'inner weaknesses', 'slow and creeping paralysis of will and creativity'. The net result was that

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[3]Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), Chapter 5. For similar views see Bhikhu Parekh, "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Crisis of Modernization", in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh ed., *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India,* pp.21-56. Also see Sudipta Kaviraj, "Religion, Politics and Modernity", in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh eds., *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*, pp.295-316.

[4]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press & Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1982 (1946)), p.175.

society became rigid, all individuality and creativity were lost. While India went into a slumber, Europe forged ahead[5]

In his early writings, especially in his *An Autobiography,* Nehru gives the impression that integrating with the 'spirit of the age' involves a complete break with India's past and traditions:

> Many of us had a cut adrift the peasant outlook, and the old ways of custom and religion had become alien to us. We called ourselves 'modern' and thought in terms of progress and industrialization and a higher standard of living and collectivisation. We considered the peasants' point of view reactionary and some, a growing number, looked with favour towards communism and socialism. [6]

In the *Autobiography,* Nehru gives an account of the views of Motilal Nehru. This could apply equally well to Nehru's own early views:

> He did not look back to a revival of India of ancient times. He had no sympathy or understanding of them and utterly disliked many old social customs, caste and the like, which he considered reactionary. He looked to the West and felt greatly attracted by Western progress and thought that this [could be achieved in India] through an association with the West.[7]

In fact, Nehru's impatience with tradition and religion is apparent in his initial assessment of Gandhi, whom he met at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in 1916. Nehru writes that he admired Gandhi and his campaigns in South Africa but

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[5]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India,* pp.95-96.Also see Bhikhu Parekh, "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Crisis of Modernization", pp.31 33. and Thomas Pantham, "Understanding Nehru's Political Ideology" in Amal Ray et. al. eds., *The Nehru Legacy: An Appraisal* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH, 1991), p.176.

[6] Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: John Lane Bodley Head, 1945), p. 254.

[7] Ibid., pp.23-24.

Gandhi seemed, "very distant, different and unpolitical".[8] He became concerned about the complexion, which the non-cooperation movement (1920-1922) was taking under Gandhi's leadership:

> Gandhiji was continually laying stress on the religious and spiritual side of the movement. His religion was not dogmatic, but it did mean definitely a religious outlook on life and the whole movement was strongly influenced by this outlook and took on a revivalist character. I used to be troubled by the growth of the religious element in our politics, both on the Hindu and Muslim side. Much of what Moulavis and Moulanas and Swamis and the like said in their public addresses seemed to me unfortunate. Their history and sociology and economics appeared to me all wrong and the religious twist that was given to everything prevented clear thinking. [9]

In the *Autobiography* Nehru is very categorical in his rejection of Gandhi's anti-modernism.

> Few of us I think accepted Gandhiji's old ideas about machinery and modern civilization. We thought that even he looked upon them as utopian and as largely inapplicable to modern conditions. Certainly, most of us were not prepared to reject the achievements of modern civilization.... Personally, I have always felt attracted to big machinery and fast travel. [10]

In his later writings especially in the *Discovery of India* (1946), Nehru turns away from abstract modernity. Nehru speaks out against what he calls 'glib modernists':

> There are those who speak glibly of modern spirit and the essence of Western culture. They take the external form and other trappings of the West and imagine that they are at the vanguard of an advancing civilization. Naive and shallow and full of their own conceits, they live chiefly in a few large cities, an artificial life which has no contacts with the culture of East or of the West.[11]

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[8]Ibid., p.35.
[9]Ibid., p.75.
[10]Ibid., p.77.

[11]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p.517.

For Nehru, India's move towards modernity must not come at the expense of traditions:

> India must break with much of her past and not allow it to dominate the present. Our lives are encumbered with the dead-wood of the past; all that is dead and has served its purpose has to go. But that does not mean a break with or a forgetting of the vital and life giving in that past....It is not the vital and life giving that we have to break with, but all the dust and dirt of ages that have covered her up and hidden her inner beauty and significance.... We have to cut away these excrescences .... Old as we are ...we have to grow young again, in tune with our present time. [12]

The road ahead was clear enough to Nehru: "The National progress lies neither in a repetition of the past nor in its denial. New patterns must inevitably be adopted and they must be integrated with the old." [13]

The idea of integrating modernity and tradition, rather than giving up substantive rationality in favour of formal and the need for historical continuity are recurring themes in Nehru's copious writings and speeches:

> There can be no doubt that India will be industrialized and will take on progressively more and more the appearance of a modern industrial society. In doing so she will shed many of her superstitions and past practices and develop a new dynamism, as indeed she is doing today. But I doubt very much if this change will result in her losing her individuality, which has been a traditional feature throughout her history. Indeed it would be a pity if she lost her uniqueness and individuality and become a copy of the West. [14]

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[12]Ibid., pp. 509-510.
[13]Ibid., p.517.

[14]Jawaharlal Nehru, " Forward to *India: The Country and its Traditions* by Jean Filliozat (1967)" in S. Gopal ed., Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.239.

On another occasion, Nehru said:

> The individual human being or race or nation must necessarily have a certain depth and a certain roots somewhere. They do not count for much unless they have roots in the past, which past is after all the accumulation of generations of experience and some type of wisdom. It is essential that you have that otherwise, you become pale copies of something, which has no real meaning to you as an individual or group. On the other-hand, one cannot live in roots alone. Even roots wither unless they come in the sun and free air. Only then can roots give you sustenance.[15]

After independence, Nehru made verbal concessions to continuity and traditions, but he did nothing, which could even remotely be regarded as a revival and revitalization of traditions. In the *Discovery*, Nehru identified three institutions as central to traditional Indian society, viz. caste system, villages and joint family. He rejected caste system and joint family system as inappropriate to the modern age. He was somewhat more appreciative of self-sufficient villages.[16] Indeed, he made some efforts to revive village self-government after independence. But this does not contradict Nehru's record as a compulsive modernizer. As his critics point out, Nehru created a modern state; put his trust in a colonial era, elitist bureaucracy; technocratic planning commission and tried to forge modernization from above. It was as if he distrusted people and

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[15]Jawaharlal Nehru, "What is culture," speech delivered at the inauguration of ICCR, New Delhi, April 1950, in *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1967),Vol.2, p.358.

[16]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, pp.252-254.

wanted modernity in India in spite of them. A small-enlightened rational elite, Nehru felt, would achieve it.[17]

Post-independent India's excitement with modernity found expression in massive industrial, manufacturing and engineering projects and what Ashis Nandy describes as 'mega science'.[18] Inaugurating the Bhakra Nangal canal in July1954, Nehru made his famous 'Temples of Modern India' speech, in which he expressed unadulterated joy at India's tryst with science and modernity: " As I walked round the site", Nehru declaimed, "I thought that these days the biggest temple and mosque and gurudwara is the place where man works for the good of mankind. Which place can be greater than this, this Bhakra Nangal, where thousands and lakhs of men have worked, have shed their blood and sweat and laid down their lives as well? Where can be greater and holier place than this, which we can regard as higher?"[19]

Sunil Khilnani thinks that the design of Chandigarh, the new capital of Punjab done by the modernist architect, Le Corbusier (under Nehru's direct patronage) as epitomising the Nehruvian idea of modern India. Chandigarh's design is starkly modernist. It was as if

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[17]Bhikhu Parekh, "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Crisis of Modernization", pp.36-41.Also see Judith M. Brown, *Nehru: Profile in Power* (London: Longman, 1999), pp.79-80.

[18]Ashis Nandy, "The Political Culture of Modern Indian State", *Daedalus* (Fall 1989), pp.1-25.

[19]Jawaharlal Nehru, "The Temples of Modern India", a speech at the opening of the Nangal Canal, 8 July1954, in S. Gopal ed., *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, p. 214.

Nehru wished India to be free of the contradictory modernity of the Raj and nostalgia for its own indigenous past. Nehru's commitment to modernity was such that no concession was made to Indian heritage in the design.[20]

Science became a leitmotif of the Nehru years. Nehru's enthusiasm for it was unbounded. This comes across vividly in his writings:

> I have long been a dumb driven chariot of Indian politics. And though circumstances made me part company with science....I arrived again at science through devious processes. I realized that science was not only a pleasant diversion and abstraction, but was of the very texture of life, without which our modern world would vanish away....It was science alone that that can solve these problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people.[21]

However, Nehru was nothing if not contradictory. As Khilnani rightly points out, if one impulse in Nehru's idea of India appeared to break with the past, another was to treasure historical continuity and the layering of cultures.[22] Nehru the enthusiast for science could also sound a note of warning:

> So while excessive specialization and technological development do obviously lead to the larger good of humanity in many ways, a doubt creeps into my mind whether they are not undermining humanity at the same time by the lowering of the quality of mind and spirit and by engendering tendencies of self destruction. [23]

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[20]Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Penguin, 1997), p.132.

[21]Jawaharlal Nehru, "An Address to the Indian Science Congress", Calcutta, 26 December 1934, in S. Gopal ed., *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology,* p.447.

[22]Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* p.136.

[23]Jawaharlal Nehru, "Speech at the Annual session of FICCI", New Delhi, 31 March 1951, in S. Gopal ed., *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology,* p.446.

In Nehru's "Will and Testament", Nehru became almost lyrical in pleading that the quest for modernity must not involve a complete break with the past:

> Though I have discarded much of past tradition and custom and am anxious that India should rid herself of all shackles that bind and constrain her people, and suppress vast numbers of them and prevent the free development of the body and the spirit; though I seek all this, yet I do not wish to cut myself off from that past completely. I am proud of that great inheritance that has been ours, and I am conscious that I too like all of us, am a link in that unbroken chain which goes back to the dawn of history in the immemorial part of India. That chain I would not break for I treasure it and seek inspiration from it. [24]

In Nehru we see a person who is visibly excited about modernity and still keeps harping about tradition and historical continuity. Was he contradicting himself? Gyan Prakash [25] is very insightful in this context. He argues that Indian nationalists were trying to create a 'national modernity' not just in the inner, spiritual realm (as Partha Chatterjee suggests) but also in the outer material realm. Colonial justification to rule was that it purveyed modernity/ science/ rationality. It staged science as a 'spectacle' to impress the colonial population. Indian nationalists responded by searching for indigenous traditions of science/ modernity /rationality. They were trying to show that knowledge significant to contemporary world was known to Indian traditions. Nehru in his *Discovery of India* has given particular

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[24]Jawaharlal Nehru, "Will and Testament", 21 June 1954, in S. Gopal ed., *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, p.648.

[25]Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Chapter 7.

emphasis to ancient Indian materialism, rationalism, and scholarly and scientific achievements. It is tantamount to saying that India has known science and rationality; hence it could be a nation. So even in the outer realm there could be a national modernity. To possess India's own scientific traditions, not only meant that India had existed as a people long before colonialism, but also that India's existence as a community was irreducibly different. So even when Nehru speaks about modernity on the one hand and then about combining modernity with spiritualism and culture on the other, he is not contradicting himself. He is searching for an Indian modernity, which can exist not only in 'inner spiritual plane' but also in the 'outer material plane'. So Nehru's commitment to science and industry was not a slavish imitation of the West.

Indians of the past had achieved a modernity of their own before they lost touch with the universal progress of history. So modernity in the maternal realm need not for India, be a wholly new and imitative enterprise. India's own traditions of modernity could be explored. Such a modernity would be different from the modernity of the West, and would constitute a critique of western modernity.

Nehru's Nationalism

In chapter 2, an account was given of the various tendencies in nationalist thinking. It is not out of place to revisit them. Those who think of the nation as a 'natural order' are regarded as 'primordialists' while those who regard it as a recent construct arising from socio-

economic transformation of the past two centuries are ' modernists'. 'Perennialists' understand nationalism as being rooted in long-standing ethnic allegiances, but do not regard them as immutable.

It was also argued that 'modern' understandings of the nation, where the nation is seen as a fraternity of basically strangers, made possible by the objective condition of modernity remain true to the normative concerns of modernity while primordialist/ perennialists understandings of the nation, in order to protect what are seen as 'national traditions' go against the normative concerns of modernity. Writers like Eric Hobsbawm have alerted us to the fact that even nations conscious of their modernity actually invent traditions and assert the antiquity of their nationality in order to buttress national solidarity. [26]

How does Nehru fit into all these? It is quite obvious that he does not subscribe to a voluntarist (modernist) idea of India – a view that modernity abstracted Indians from particularistic identities and they came together as individuals in a colonial civil society and then established a national solidarity on the basis of shared interests. In his writings Nehru comes across as a primordialist. His *Discovery of India* (1946) is actually a narrative of the Indian nation.

[26]For an overview of the various understandings of nationalism see Ian Talbott, *India and Pakistan: Inventing the Nation* (London: Arnold, 2000), p.3.

For Nehru, Indian nationality was not something new. It was forged at the 'dawn of history'. He often turns effusive in narrating its glories:

> Few countries have been marked out by geography for unity as India has been. But India is not a mere geographical entity. It is something more and deeper. It is an idea which has influenced the people who have lived here and who have come from other countries and found a home here since the beginning of civilization....We must remember that this idea originally took shape at the earliest dawn of civilization in the world and the books that contain it are possibly the oldest extant records of the working of the human mind. Through long ages during which the world emerges from darkness, that idea developed and underwent many changes, yet clinging to its foundations. [27]

The numerous peoples and cultures, which entered India happily merged and a syncretic Indian nation, emerged. Syncretism, pluralism and tolerance are the main themes of Indian nationhood for Nehru. In due course India acquired a genius of her own; which was distinctive but not exclusive:[28]

> It would seem that every outside element that has come to India and been absorbed by India has given something to India and taken much from her; it has contributed to its own and India's strength. But where it has kept apart, or been unable to become a sharer and participant in India's life, and her rich and diverse culture, it has had no lasting influence....Whatever the origin might have been, all of them have become distinctly Indian, participating jointly with others in India's culture and looking back on her past tradition as their own. [29]

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[27]Jawaharlal Nehru, "Postscript to *An Autobiography*", in S. Gopal ed., *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, p.475.

[28]Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, chapter 3. Also see Ashutosh Varshney, "Contested Meanings: India's National Identity, Hindu Nationalism, and the Politics of Anxiety", *Deadalus* (Summer 1993), pp.235-239.

[29]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p.146.

Nehru famously likened the Indian nationhood to a palimpsest on which successive generations have written, but no layer of writing is fully erased: "India was like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously."[30] For Nehru therefore, Indian nationality though primordial, was accommodating and inclusive. Nehru's nationalist imagination had none of the exclusiveness usually seen in nationalist visions. What is more, he saw Indian nation not as some unchanging entity but as open to change and possessing a natural dynamism.

In the *Discovery of India,* Nehru defines nationalism thus: "Nationalism is essentially a group memory of past achievement, traditions and experiences."[31]This is certainly a primordialist understanding of the nation. But Nehru is also aware of the drawbacks of nationalism. "Nationalism", writes Nehru, "is essentially an anti-feeling and it feeds and fattens on the hatred and anger against other national groups and especially against rulers of a subject country."[32]Nehru associates nationalism with spiritualism and magic and sees it as the antithesis of a modern scientific outlook.

> There are also in India, as in many other countries, the usual accompaniments of growing nationalism – an idealism, a mysticism, a feeling of exaltation, a belief in the mission of ones own country and something in the nature of religious

[30]Ibid., p.42.

[31]Ibid., p.515.

[32]Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography,* p.75.

> revivalism....Our politics must be either be those of magic or of science. The former of course requires no argument or logic; the latter at least in theory is based on clarity of though and reasoning and has no room for vague idealistic or religious or sentimental processes which confuse and befog the mind. Personally I have no faith in or use for the ways of magic or religion and I can only consider questions on scientific grounds.[33]

In short, Nehru despite being a primordialist in his understanding of nationalism, was free from the exclusiveness, intolerance and social conservatism, which primordialist nationalism often partakes of.

A dissenting view of Nehruvian nationalism is offered by G. Aloysius.[34] He argues that Nehru's nationalism was far from benign. Aloysius' reading of Nehru's *Discovery of India* is extremely unconventional. Aloysius points out that Nehru's national imagination was 'culturalist' (primordialist) and suffers from all the problems, which bedevil this kind of nationalism.

The most striking character of Nehru's narrative of India, opines Aloysius, is that Nehru sees Indian nation as very ancient. But he identifies its origin virtually with Indo-Aryans later called Hindus, meaning caste Hindus. His account of ancient India is an account of how Indo-Aryans came, conquered, and civilized India and established 'national typical' institutions of 'Arya dharma', caste, village society

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[33]Jawaharlal Nehru, " Whither India", in S. Gopal ed., *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund and Orient Longman, 1974), Vol. 6, p.3.

[34]G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India,* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 5.

and joint family. These provided the basis for a 'national typical' cultural synthesis. So long as these institutions functioned, all was well with India. Once they declined, problems began. Aloysius points out that Nehru was ambivalent in his attitude towards non Aryan, pre Aryan and Buddhist traditions. To drive home the point, Aloysius quotes Nehru: "Aryan faith, Nehru writes, "was essentially *a national* (emphasis added) religion restricted to the land, and the social caste structure it was developing emphasized this aspect of it." [35]

Aloysius argues that Nehru's national imagination, despite his reputation as a modernist, came frightfully close to that of Gandhi or even Savarkar. Nehru's national imagination shared many elements of other culturalist/nationalist/primordialist understandings of Indian nationalism. These include a preference for and priority of Aryan/ Brahman races, their role in developing the ideology of the nation and the necessity, hence, of salvaging as much of these ideals as possible from attacks of modernity.[36]

Nehru and the Caste Question

The question is whether Nehru's nationalism forces him to turn his back on modernity and become a social conservative or worse, a

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[35]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p.175.

[36]G. Aloysius, *Nationalism Without a Nation in India, p.162*

reactionary. His position on the caste question is a good way of probing his positions on modernity and nationalism.

Partha Chatterjee has suggested that – a point made in Chapters 2 and 3 – when confronted with colonial modernity and its claim to civilization, anti-colonial nationalism begins by claiming a sovereign, national realm in the 'inner spiritual' cultural sphere. As such, on issues like caste and women's question; modernity and its insights are kept away and tradition is nurtured. Nicholas Dirks suggests that this can take two positions: (1) Either nationalists say that reorganization of society along modern lines can wait till political independence or (2) they can take the position that caste is part of the tradition of the nation and hence colonial modernity should have no role. Further colonial modernity must make way for a national modernity where caste should have a role.[37]

Nehru's approach was basically of the first type in Dirks' scheme. During the struggle for independence, although mindful of the problems of caste, he did not want to address it directly and hoped that the processes of modernity, industrialization, urbanization etc., would bring it to an end. At the same time, Nehru was 'nationalist' enough to see caste as an ancient Indian institution with something to commend for it. This basic contradiction in his position made his approach to the 'caste question' extremely ambivalent.

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[37]Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp.232-235.

In the *Discovery of India*, Nehru betrays a sneaking admiration for the unique and (in Aloysius' words) 'national typical' institution of caste:

> Indo-Aryans were evolving a civilization in a land full of variety and different types of human beings. The normal way to deal with these problems then and later was to exterminate or enslave the conquered population. This was not followed in India. But it is clear that every precaution was taken to perpetuate the superior position of the upper castes. Having assured that superiority, a kind of multiple community state was built up, in which within certain limits and subject to some general rules, freedom was given to each group to follow its avocation and to live its own life in accordance with its own custom. The only restriction was that it must not interfere with or come into conflict with another group....Within each group equal rights and democracy existed. Elected leaders guided it and frequently consulted the entire group whenever any important question arose. These groups were almost always functional; each specializing in a particular trade or craft....They became some kind trade union or craft guild. There was strong solidarity within each group ....Over and above this, a strong and fairly successful attempt was made to create a common national bond which would hold all these groups together. [38]

In short, Nehru glorifies caste system as an institution (worked out by Indian national genius) to ensure peaceful coexistence of diverse groups, avoid unnecessary competition and nurture a national spirit transcending group identity.

However, Nehru quickly contradicts himself. A few pages on in the *Discovery of India,* we come across a devastating critique of the caste system:

> The conception and practice of caste embodied the aristocratic ideal and was opposed to democratic conceptions.... India's success and achievements were confined to the upper classes;

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[38]Jawaharlal Nehru, The *Discovery on India,* pp. 250-251.

> those lower down in this scale had very few chances and their opportunities were strictly limited. But the ultimate weakness and failing of the caste system and the Indian social structure were that they degraded human beings and gave them no opportunities to get out of that condition. In the context of today, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary restrictions and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within this framework nor there be political democracy and much less economic democracy. Between these two conceptions, conflict is inherent and only one can survive. [39]

Having admitted that the institution of caste is utterly out of place in the modern world, Nehru shows no eagerness to attack it. He hoped that it would just go away with the processes of modernity. If any effort was to be made to remove caste, then it must be a 'critical traditionalist' approach like Gandhi's. He felt that the nation would be a casualty in any outright war against the caste system.

In the *Autobiography* Nehru expresses his disgust at Gandhi's decision to 'fast unto death' to reverse the 'Communal Award' (1932) giving separate electorates to Untouchables:

> I felt annoyed with him for choosing a *side issue* for his final sacrifice – just a question of electorate. Would not larger issues fade into background, for the time being at least? ... After so much sacrifice and brave endeavour, was our movement to trail into something insignificant. I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question. [40]

Nehru writes that although he was happy at the success of the Harijan movement, he feared that it would displace weightier, truly national issues:

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[39]Ibid., p.257.

[40]Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p.370

> There was no doubt that a tremendous push had been given to the movement to end untouchability and raise the unhappy depressed classes.... That was to be welcomed. But it was equally obvious that civil disobedience had suffered. The country's attention had been diverted to other issues, and many congress workers had turned to Harijan cause.[41]

In Nehru's corpus, criticisms and apprehensions against caste system are not difficult to find. Interestingly, many of these critiques are informed by values of modernity. However, when it comes to fighting caste system, Nehru develops cold feet. Towards the very end of the *Discovery of India* he writes:

> Caste system is the symbol and embodiment of exclusivity among Hindus. It is sometimes said that the basic idea of caste might remain, but its harmful developments and ramifications should go; that it should not depend on birth but on merit. This merely confuses the issue....If merit is the only criterion and opportunity is thrown open to everybody, caste loses its present day distinguishing features and in fact ends. Caste has in the past not only led to a suppression of certain groups, but (also) to a separation of theoretical and scholarly learning from craftsmanship, and a divorce philosophy from actual life and its problem. It was an aristocratic approach based on traditionalism. This outlook has to change completely. For it is wholly opposed to modern conditions and the democratic ideal.[42]

In his presidential address to the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress (1929), Nehru said:

> Great was the success of India in evolving a stable society, yet she failed in a vital particular and because she failed in this she fell and remains fallen. No solution was found for the problem of inequality. India deliberately ignored this and built up her social structure on inequality and we have the tragic consequence of this in the millions of our people who till

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[41]Ibid., p. 372.

[42]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p.520.

yesterday were suppressed and had little opportunity for growth.[43]

When it came to fighting caste system, Nehru put his trust on the impersonal forces of modernity lest a head on collision might endanger national solidarity.

> It is only today that caste is seriously threatened and its basis has been attacked. This is not chiefly because of some powerful urge to reform, which has arisen in Hindu society, though such an urge is undoubtedly present, nor is it because of powerful ideas of the West, though such ideas have certainly exerted their influence. The change that is taking place before our eyes is due essentially *to basic economic changes* (emphasis added) which has shaken up the fabric of Indian society and are likely to upset it completely.[44]

In the presidential address at the Lucknow session (1936) of the Congress, Nehru came back to the theme:

> The problem of untouchability and Harijans can be approached in different ways. For a socialist, it presents no difficulty, for under socialism there can be no differentiation and victimization. Economically speaking, Harijans have constituted the landless proletariat and an economic solution removes the barriers that custom and tradition have raised.[45]

If at all a direct attack was to be made on caste system it had perforce to be along the Gandhian line of least resistance. In the *Discovery*, Nehru writes:

> In our own period numerous movements to break the tyranny of caste have arisen among middle classes and they have made a difference, but not a vital one as far as the masses are

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[43]Dorothy Norman ed., *Nehru: The First Sixty Years* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), vol.1, p.198.

[44]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p.246.

[45]Dorothy Norman ed., *Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, Vol. I, p.435.

> concerned. Their method was one of direct attack. Then Gandhi came and tackled the problem, after the immemorial Indian fashion in an indirect way and his eyes were on the masses. He has been direct enough, aggressive enough, persistent enough, but without challenging the original basic functional theory underlying the four main castes. He has attacked the rank undergrowth and overgrowth knowing well that he was undermining the caste structure thereby.[46]

Elsewhere Nehru has written:

> It was the virtue of Gandhiji to keep his feet firmly planted in the rich traditions of our race and our soil and at the same time, to function on the revolutionary plane....Many eminent social reformers came before him and succeeded in bringing about some minor changes or in building a new sect, but Gandhiji talking in terms of 'Rama Rajya' brought revolution to millions of homes without people realizing fully what was happening. He seldom condemned caste as a whole, but by his insistence on the uplift of Depressed Classes and removal of untouchability, he undermined the entire caste system.[47]

In short, much like Gandhi, Nehru also insisted on finding a 'national typical' solution to the caste question: "India must find a solution to this problem....That solution need not necessarily follow the example of any other country. It must, if it has to endure, be based on the genius of the people and be an outcome of her thought and culture."[48]

After independence, Nehru's approach became more straightforwardly modernist. It is almost as if the burden of fighting an

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[46]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p.121.

[47]Jawaharlal Nehru, "The Past, the Present and the Future", AICC Economic Review, 15 March 1959, in S. Gopal ed., *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, p.114.

[48]Dorothy Norman Ed., *Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, Vol.1, p.198.

external enemy having lifted, the nation could address some of its pressing problems.

Nehru was one of the chief architects of the Constitution, which, as Granville Austin has shown, had the aim of creating a social revolution in India. [49]

Social revolution was sought to be effected by getting rid of all identitarian notions of nationhood and creating a modern citizenship. This made every Indian an equal and full member of the Indian polity, cutting across caste, gender, and religious differences. In other words, the category of citizenship was privileged over ascriptive identities. Although some group identities were recognised by the Constitution, the same privilege was not extended to the caste structure. To do away with the practice of untouchability, the Constitution granted equal social and political rights to all individuals. The notion of good that members of a particular caste might endorse did not act in this case as a deterrent. In fact groups that had been oppressed for generations were provided 'reservations' at various levels. Through affirmative actions of this kind, framers of the Constitution hoped that members of these castes would be able to participate as equals in the political life of the state.[50]

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[49]Granville Austin, *India's Constitution: the Cornerstone of a Nation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.50.

[50]Gurpreet Mahajan, "Cultural Embodiment and Histories: Towards Construction of Self", in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh eds., *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India,* pp.350-351.

Austin points out that while the Fundamental Rights primarily protect the individuals from arbitrary or prejudicial state action, Articles like Article 17(prohibition of untouchability) and articles 15(prohibition of discrimination), are aimed at protecting individuals from the tyranny of society. Caste system, to be precise, is their target. Similarly, the section on Directive Principles aims at making Indians free in a positive sense.[51] Constitution, Austin argues, created in India a 'new equality' completely absent in traditional Indian society.[52]

After independence, Nehru's zeal in bringing about a modern society brought him into conflict with such towering figures as Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhai Patel and Purushottam Das Tandon. In 1950, Tandon was elected as the Congress President. Nehru regarded him as an inveterate reactionary. His refusal to co-operate with Tandon ultimately forced Tandon to resign.[53]

One of the key issues, which caused much dissent within the Congress party, was the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to modernize the Hindu civil code and organise it on individualistic lines. A colonial-era Bill, it came before the Constituent Assembly. It was a touchstone

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[51]Granville Austin, *India's Constitution: The Cornerstone of a Nation, p.51.*

[52]Ibid., p. 114.

[53]Granville Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution: The Indian Experience* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.19-35.

against which Congress social agenda would be judged. Nehru was all for it. Although not specifically concerned with the 'caste question', it nevertheless tells one a lot about Nehru government's general attitude towards social issues. Nehru brushed aside opposition to the Bill. Opponents of the Bill invoked sanctity of traditions and religion. But Nehru despite his nationalism, did not buy it. However, the Bill could not be passed by the Constituent Assembly. It was passed as separate legislations dealing with divorce, marriage, succession and adoption by the first Lok Sabha over a period of time. Despite the fact that the original Bill was considerably watered down, the passage of the Bill was a considerable achievement.[54]

Nehru's position on social issues is well expressed in a speech he made during a debate on the Hindu Marriage Bill in Lok Sabha:

> I think the Bill is highly important in the context of our national development. We talk about the five years plans, about economic progress, industrialization, and they are all highly important. But I have no doubt in my mind that the real progress of the country means progress not only on the economic plane, but also on the social plane. They have to be integrated when a great nation goes forward. [55]

When the reservation scheme put in place for the benefit of the backward classes by Madras government was struck down by Madras High Court as being violative of the Constitution, Nehru government

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[54]Reba Som, "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Hindu Code: A Victory of Symbol over Substance", *Modern Asian Studies* (28 (1), 1994), pp. 165-194.

[55]Jawaharlal Nehru, Speech during the third reading of the Hindu Marriage Bill in Lok Sabha, 5 March 1955, in *The Speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry on Information and Broadcasting, 1958), Vol.3, p.446.

introduced the First Constitutional Amendment to protect the reservation scheme. In a speech in the Lok Sabha during a debate on the First Amendment, Nehru made clear that it was necessary not only to recognise caste as a category but also to give backward castes special protection:

> Take another very important objective of ours: the attempt to realize an egalitarian society. We want to put an end to all those infinite divisions that have arisen in our social life; I am referring to caste system.... It is our objective to get rid of thes e divisions and build a united India where people don't think in terms of castes/ communities. However, we cannot overlook existing social division and fissures. We are obliterating them, but the process is slow. We cannot ignore present facts. Therefore one has to keep a balance between the facts as we find them and the objective and ideal we aim at. [56]

Nehru pleaded that in order to raise those who were down; in order to have non-discrimination in a substantive sense formal equality had to be given up sometimes.[57]

Conclusion

It is easy to see a very clear distinction in Nehru's approach towards social issues before and after independence. Prior to independence he was ambivalent about dealing directly with the 'caste question'. This is a problem with nationalism, which Partha Chatterjee has familiarised us with. Nehru's nationalism was of the primordialist variety. Since he used syncretic Hinduism as the basis for Indian nationality, he could

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[56]Jawaharlal Nehru, "Equality and Backward Classes", speech on the first amendment, New Delhi, 29 May 1951, in *The Speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1967) , Vol.2, p.515.

[57]Ibid., 514-515.

not openly challenge institutions like caste[58]. After independence, Nehru became proactive on social issues. This could be because - as Gyan Prakash suggests – Nehru felt that an Indian modernity could be realised in the 'outer material realm' itself and he stopped being very protective about the inner realm.

[58]Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Minds: Colonialism and Making of Modern India* ,p. 235.

Chapter 5

Ambedkar and the Interrogation of Nationalism

Bhimrao Ramji "Babasaheb" Amredkar(1891-1956)encountered the national movement when the dominant tendency in it was of Hindu culturalism. He interrogated it using the insights of modernity and found it wanting. He sought to give an alternative idea of nationalism, one which was respectful of culture but consistent with the emancipation of those rendered underprivileged by the traditional order.

Ambedkar's Engagement with Modernity

Ambedkar was an avowed modernist. Bhikhu Parekh points out that in the Indian contest 'modernist's were those who viewed Hindu society as beyond hope and felt that salvation lay in radically restructuring it along modern European lines.[1]This essentially meant creating a society of 'unencumbered' individuals (i.e., those freed from any commitment to ascriptive identities other than those of their own choice) endowed with equal rights as citizens. This alone would liberate people weighed down by traditions. Ambedkar wrote: "The assertion by the individual of his own opinion and beliefs, his own independence and interests is the beginning of all reforms."[2]A society where all individuals would enjoy equal rights and none would have privileges was for Ambedkar, the ultimate ideal. The modern,

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[1] Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonalism Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi: Sage, 1989), p.35.
[2] B.R. Ambedkar, "The Annihilation of Caste", in V. Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, 1989) , Vol.1, p.5.

'Enlightenment' ideals of life, liberty and fraternity were constant themes in his writings and speeches. Towards the end of his life, in an A.I.R. broadcast (3October 1954) on 'My Personal Philosophy', Ambedkar said: "My personal philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity".[3]

Although Ambedkar wanted a society of free and equal individuals, not weighed down by any identity other than those, which the individuals freely choose, he recognised that the amelioration of Untouchables in India demanded at least in the short run, a deviation from modern liberal principles.

Ambedkar realised that caste and traditions were tenacious. So to liberate those who had been oppressed under traditions, Untouchables as a group had to be made aware of their debased conditions. Further, since Untouchables had been discriminated as a group, they as a group needed to enjoy special rights before they could integrate with the rest of the society simply as individuals. Elanor Zelliot points out that Ambedkar advocated a separatist policy of accentuating distinctions at an initial stage in order to create a society in which identities would be unimportant.[4]

Ambedkar never gave up the ideal of a society of free and equal individuals. In his deposition before the Southborough Committee

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[3] Quoted by Dhananyay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962), p.456.

[4] For Ambedkar's modification of liberalism, see Elanor Zelliot, "Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership", in *From Untouchable to Dalit:* Essays on the Ambedkar Movement (Delhi: Manohar, 1992), pp.158-159.Also see Vdhu Verma, "Colonalism and Liberation: Ambedkar's Quest for Distributive Justice", *Economic and Political Weekly* (25 September 1999), p.2807.

(1919) where Ambedkar had demanded separate electorates for Untouchables, he said:

> While communal electorates will be coterminous with social division, their chief effect will be to bring together men from diverse castes who would not otherwise mix together, into a legislative council. The legislative council will thus begin a new cycle of participation in which the representatives of various castes who were erst-while isolated will be thrown into an associated life....The moment several castes and groups begin to have contacts and co-operation with one another, re-socialization of fossilized attitudes is bound to be the result. [5]

Ambedkar's Strategies for Dalit Emancipation

To secure the liberation of Untouchables Ambedkar followed basically two strategies: The first was the modernist strategy of winning complete individual rights and special group rights for Untouchables by projecting them as an oppressed minority. This strategy would be pursued through independent political mobilization of Untouchables. Secondly, Ambedkar acknowledged that basic human needs of Untouchables were not only material but also non-material. This meant that Untouchable liberation was not complete unless they could live with dignity in a certain cultural community. This perforce involved raising the educational levels and changing the life style of Untouchables.[6]

Coming to the second strategy first, Ambedkar realised that an abstract modernity where all individuals would enjoy full and equal civic rights was not enough. These rights had to be enjoyed within a

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[5] B.R. Ambedkar, "Evidence before the Southborough Committee", in V. Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar; Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, pp.266-267.
[6] Vidhu Verma, "Colonalism and Liberation: Ambedkar's Quest for Distributive Justice", pp.2806-2807.

certain culture. That is to say, Untouchable liberation would not be complete till the culture they were part of was democratised.

To begin with, Ambedkar sought to achieve dignity for Untouchables within Hindu Society. This meant pursuing a reformist agenda therein. Between 1919 (when Ambedkar made his presentation before the Southborough Committee) and 1931 (when Ambedkar openly clashed with Gandhi at the second session of the Round Table Conference in London on the question of separate electorates for the Untouchables) Ambedkar was trying to bring some kind of reconciliation between Hindus and Untouchables.

Ambedkar urged his followers to give up the so called unclean practices, such as alcoholism, eating of carrion etc. In 1924, he set up 'Bahishkrut Hitkarini Sabha' for the educational and social uplift of Untouchables. Most importantly, Ambedkar actively supported temple entry movements.

Ambedkar keenly followed the fortunes of Vaikom Temple Entry Satyagraha (1924-25) in Travancore state, launched by Gandhians. In 1926 Mahars, members of Ambedkar's own caste conducted a Satyagraha to open Parvati Temple at Poona. Between 1930 and 1935, a prolonged Satyagraha campaign was conducted to open Kalaram Temple in Nasik for Untouchables. All these endeavours ended in failure. The most dramatic incident however was Mahad Satyagraha (1927). Mahad, a small town in western Maharashtra, had passed a resolution opening a public tank to all, including Untouchables. A Depressed Classes conference held in the town under Ambedkar's

leadership resolved to assert the right of Untouchables to drink water from the tank. In pursuance of the decision, a group of Untouchables drank water from the tank. This raised the ire of Caste Hindus who assaulted the Untouchable volunteers and broke up the conference. Later the tank was ritually cleansed. In December 1927, another Depressed Classes conference was held in the town. This time no effort was made to drink water from the tank. However in an act of defiance, *Mamusmrsiti* was burned and Ambedkar took the lead.[7]

The setbacks received in the temple entry movements and in the Mahad Satyagraha possibly convinced Ambedkar that democratising Hindu society was virtually an impossible task. His burning of *Masusmriti* at Mahad was a symbolic parting of ways with efforts towards reconciliation with Hindu society. Later Ambedkar wrote about the incident:

> The rock on which the Hindu social order has been built is the *Manusmriti*. It is part of the scriptures and is therefore sacred to all Hindus. Being sacred, it is infallible. Every Hindu believes in its sanctity and obeys its injunctions. Manu not only upholds caste and Untouchability but gives them a legal sanction. The burning of the *Manusmrtiti* was a deed of great daring. It was an attack on the very citadel of Hinduism. The *Manusmriti* embodied the spirit of inequality which is at the basis of Hindu life and thought, just as the Bastille was the embodiment of the spirit of the 'Ancient Regime' in France. [8]

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[7] Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1994), pp.142-158. Also see Elanor Zelliot, "Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership", pp.163-164.

[8] B.R. Ambedkar, "The Rock on which it is Built", in V. Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1989), Vol.5, p.253.

By the early 1930s, Ambedkar had moved away from the reformist path. He urged his followers to put their trust in political power. In a speech at Worli on 28 September 1932, Ambedkar said:

> You must show greater concern with how to overcome hunger than with effort to seek spiritual solace through pre-occupation with idols in temples.... It is foolish and self deceptive to blame your present miserable condition on your fate. Cast away such notions. I am convinced that if you give up such credulous beliefs and if each one of you keeps an eye on the political situation and makes use of political power, our social ills will disappear.[9]

Ambedkar showed little keenness for the Untouchability Abolition Bill-which sought to give temple entry to Untouchables-introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly by Ranga Iyer at Gandhi's behest in 1932.[10]

This disenchantment with reformism culminated in Ambedkar's declaration at a Depressed Classes conference at Yeola in 1935 that "It was not my fault that I was born an Untouchable. I am determined that I will not die a Hindu". In the same speech, he said:

> Even this movement (temple entry movement) to obtain our ordinary rights as human beings and achieve equality in Hindu society has failed.... This weak and lonely status that we occupy is because we are part of the Hindu society.... Enter a religion where you will obtain peace and dignity. But remember to select only that religion where you will get equal status, equal opportunity and equal treatment. [11]

It has to be noted that Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism was followed not by a rejection of religion altogether. Ambedkar called

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[9]Quoted by M.S.Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought* (New Delhi: Sage, 1993), p.142.
[10] Ibid., p.142.
[11] Quoted by M.S.Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology*, p. 126. Also see Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Chapter XIII.

upon his followers to embrace another religion. It is obvious that he did not believe in abstract modernity. In an article entitled "Away from the Hindus", Ambedkar argued that being part of a community was very different from being a citizen. He felt that the former alone would end (a) the social isolation of the Untouchables and (b) their sense of inferiority.[12]

Ambedkar fulfilled his resolve not to die a Hindu by converting to Buddhism along with his numerous associates on October 14 1954, at Nagpur. Ambedkar's understanding of Buddhism was very unconventional. For him Buddhism was a social system based on the ideals of 'understanding' (as opposed to superstition), 'love' and 'equality'. He cared little for the metaphysical or purely religious side of Buddhism. Ambedkar expressed his ideas on Buddhism in his book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957). However, the main Buddhist revivalist group in India, the Mahabodhi Society did not quite approve of Ambedkar's ideas on the religion.[13]It is quite apparent that Ambedkar embraced Buddhism not for spiritual solace but to place his modern values in a certain cultural context.

The other strategy of Ambedkar was to project Untouchables as a distinct minority and demand constitutional-legal safeguards for their full integration with the larger society. This objective was sought to be achieved through independent political mobilization.

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[12] B.R.Ambedkar, "Away from the Hindus", in V.Moon ed., *Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.5, p.418.
[13] Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission, p.484 and p.518.*

Ambedkar was very clear that the recognition of Untouchables as a separate community had nothing to do with race. He rejected out of hand the view that Untouchables belonged to a pre-Aryan indigenous race. Ambedkar believed that castes arose because Brahmans enclosed themselves as a class and through imitation and a process of being closed out, other classes became castes. So Ambedkar saw no racial or colour basis behind caste. Later he added the qualification that Untouchables might have been Buddhists who resisted the domination of Brahmanism and in the struggle for supremacy got sidelined as Untouchables.[14]

Ambedkar claimed separate status for Untouchables on the ground that as a group they experienced discrimination and their economic and social conditions consequently, were very bad. At the Plenary Session of the First Round Table Conference (November 1930) Ambedkar thus expressed his position:

> The Depressed Classes from a group by themselves which is distinct and separate from the Muhammadens (sic) and although they are included among the Hindus, they in no sense form an integral part of that community....The Depressed Classes occupy a position mid way between the serf and the slave... with the difference that the slave and the serf were permitted to have physical contacts from which the Depressed Classes are barred. They are denied all forms of equality of opportunity and the most elementary of civic rights on which human existence depends.[15]

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[14] Elanor Zelliot, "The Social and Political Thought of B.R.Ambedkar", in Thomas Pantham and Kenneth Deutsch eds., *Political Thought in Modern India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1986), p.170.

[15] B.R.Ambedkar, "Statement at the Plenary Session of the I Round Table Conference", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1982), Vol.2, p.503.

Throughout his public life Ambedkar held on to the view that Untouchables formed a distinct minority and that the state needed to take cognisance of this minority, endow it with special rights so as to alleviate its historically accumulated backwardness and to make good the social prejudices piled up against it.

Ambedkar's first real intervention in public life was his deposition on behalf of Untouchables before the Southborough Committee on franchise. This committee had been set up to elicit popular opinions in the run-up to the proposed Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. Ambedkar told the committee that there was no 'endosmosis' between 'Touchables' and 'Untouchables'. The latter had been dehumanised by socio-religious disabilities almost to the state of slaves and that they were denied universally accepted rights of citizenship. He concluded that the interests of Untouchables were distinctive and that no one else could represent them but themselves. He demanded separate electorates, reserved seats and representation proportional to population for Untouchables in elected bodies.[16]

Ambedkar's next significant intervention came during the proceedings of Simon Commission (1927). Although nearly all sections of the national movement had boycotted and stigmatised the Commission, Ambedkar saw it as a useful forum to further the interests of his community. However, in a climb down from the position taken before the Southborough Committee, Ambedkar settled

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[16] B.R.Ambedkar, "Evidence before the Southborough Committee", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, pp. 247-276.

for complete adult franchise and reserved seats for Depressed Classes in joint electorates, apart from special attention for Untouchables in education and public employment. This of course did not mean that Ambedkar had given up the demand that Untouchables be treated as a distinct minority. His explanation for the change in position is convincing:

> The system of joint electorates is to be preferred to that of communal electorates.... At any rate this must be said with certainty that a minority gets a larger advantage under joint electorates than it does under a system of separate electorates. With separate electorates, the minority gets its own quota and no more. The rest of the house owes no allegiance to it and is therefore not influenced by the desire to meet the wishes of the minority. [17]

At the Round Table Conference (1930-1932) held in London, to discuss the proposed new Constitution, (Simon Commission was part of the build up to the proposed constitution) Ambedkar changed his position again. It became clear at the Round Table Conference that adult franchise was not on the anvil and Ambedkar found that representatives of nearly every minority was demanding separate electorates. Ambedkar therefore, reverted to his old demand for separate electorates for Untouchables. This demand was conceded when the government of Ramsay MacDonald announced the Communal Award (1932) giving separate electorates to Untouchables apart from a few other communities. This meant that they could now

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[17] B.R.Ambedkar, "Dr, Ambedkar with the Simon Commission", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1982), Vol.2 p.531.

vote in general constituencies as well as in a few exclusive constituencies of their own.[18]

Gandhi who had attended the second Round Table Conference along with Ambedkar had clashed with the latter on the issue of separate electorates. For Gandhi, separating Untouchables from the Hindu fold, amounted effectively to a division of the nation.[19]Once the demand was conceded, Gandhi, who had been in detention at Yeravada prison in Poona, started a 'fast unto death' to reverse the Award. The fast succeeded in bringing Ambedkar around. Ambedkar and other Untouchable leaders agreed to give up separate electorates in return for a grater number of reserved seats. There was also a provision for a primary election in reserved seats open only to the Depressed Classes, which would short-list a few Depressed Class candidates. The agreement between Gandhi and Untouchable leaders came to be known as the Poona Pact (1932).[20]

Ambedkar later came to regret the Poona Pact. He maintained that it was a treachery and that he had agreed to the Pact under duress.[21]His main objection against it was that joint electorates meant that Untouchables who got elected were stooges of Caste Hindus who always out-numbered Untouchables even in reserved constituencies.

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[18] Elanor Zelliot, "The Social and Political Thought of B.R.Ambedkar", pp.164-165.
[19] See Chapter 3 for details.
[20] Elanor Zelliot, "The Social and Political Thought of B.R.Ambedkar", p.165. For an over-view of Ambedkar's various positions on constitutional matters see W.N. Kuber, *Ambedkar: A Critical Study* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1991), pp.99-120.
[21]B.R.Ambedkar, "*What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, V.Moon Ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashatra, 1991), Vol.9, Chapter 3.

Very often, candidates rejected by Untouchables in the primary election won.[22]

Ambedkar opposed the idea of a constituent assembly for India first proposed by the Cripps Mission Plan. He feared that a constituent assembly working independently of the British would not be able to protect the minorities. He argued that in India majorities were 'communal majorities' and not 'political majorities'. The former could be made and unmade, not the latter. In such a situation, minorities needed extra-ordinary safeguards and the majority should settle for a 'relative majority'.[23]

Ambedkar's own alternative was that the tasks envisaged for the constituent assembly should be divided into two classes: (1) constitutional and (2) communal. Constitutional questions should be referred to a commission presided over by an eminent constitutional lawyer from Great Britain or the U.S.A. The other members should be a Hindu and a Muslim. The term of reference should be the Government of India Act of 1935. The communal questions should be referred to a conference of the leaders of different communities. Should the conference fail to arrive at an agreed solution, the British Government should make an award. Ambedkar wanted the British to

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[22] B.R.Ambedkar, "States and Minorities", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar; Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, pp.431-432.
[23] B.R.Ambedkar, "The Communal Deadlock and how to solve it", V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, pp.355-379.

ensure that proper safeguards were in place for the Depressed Classes, before they left.[24]

Once the Constituent Assembly was formed, Ambedkar presented to it a memorandum demanding separate electorates for Depressed Classes and even separate villages.[25]

Although Ambedkar had opposed the idea of a constituent assembly, once it was formed, he was elected to it from Bengal Legislature on a Muslim League ticket and after partition (since the seat was lost) from Bombay Legislature on a Congress ticket. Ambedkar went on to become the chairman of the drafting committee. Although the safeguards he had suggested were not included in the Constitution, the Scheduled Castes were given a special constitutional status. They were provided with a range of 'protective discriminatory' measures including reserved seats in elected bodies. The Congress party had, till the 'Poona Pact', opposed the idea of separate status for Untouchables. The special status that the Constitution of free India gave them was clearly the achievement of Ambedkar.

Although Ambedkar demanded separate status for Untouchables, this was ultimately intended to integrate them in a more modern society informed by liberal values. He had no intention of keeping Untouchables apart permanently. Ambedkar's politics gives a clue to this dimension of his thinking.

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[24] W.N.Kuber, *B.R.Ambedkar* (Builers of Modern India series) (New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, 2001).
[25] B.R.Ambedkar, "States and Minorities", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, pp.384-432.

The first political party Ambedkar founded was the Independent Labour Party to contest the 1937 election. The party sought to unite all labouring classes under one platform. The party had limited success in Bombay Province where it became the third largest party after Congress and Muslim League. However it quickly lost steam. In 1942, Ambedkar set up the All India Scheduled Caste Federation to unite all Depressed Castes under one platform. This party was an abject failure with Ambedkar himself losing in the 1946 elections. He had to get into the Constituent Assembly first on a Muslim League and later on a Congress ticket. The Republican Party was conceived in the year of Ambedkar's death (1956). Its ideal was to unite all dispossessed: Untouchables, tribals, workers and the poor along with all those yearning for a better India. This party symbolised Ambedkar's vision of the Depressed Classes fully integrated with the society.[26]

Ambedkar's Verdict on Indian Traditions

Ambedkar saw the values of modernity as offering a means of emancipation for those weighed down by traditions. He was however - as has been shown- not an advocate of an acultural or a rootless modernity. His commitment to modernity was nevertheless strong enough to make him a fierce critic of the traditional order.

The basic argument of Ambedkar against traditional Indian society was that it was based on a denial of the fundamental modern values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar saw the caste

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[26] Elanor Zelliot, "The Social and Political Thought of B.R.Ambedkar", p.168.

system as the archetypal institution of traditional India and he felt that it institutionalised the denial of liberty, equality and fraternity. He held that traditional Indian society survived because it had been sanctified by Hindu religion. So at the root of all the problems of traditional India, Ambedkar saw Brahmanical / Hindu religion.

Ambedkar argued that justice was simply another name for liberty, equality and fraternity.[27]He saw not a trace of it in Hinduism. He felt that in Hinduism, social and religious inequalities were embedded in its philosophy.[28]There was no scope for liberty either. For liberty to exist three conditions must be fulfilled: social equality, economic security and the availability of knowledge to all. Hinduism upheld privileges and inequality. Thus in Hinduism, the very conditions for liberty were conspicuous by their absence.[29] Further, in Hinduism there was no choice of avocation. There was no economic independence or economic security.[30]Formal education was confined to Brahmans and all others remained illiterate and were given only practical education in their traditional avocations.[31]Hence there could be no liberty in Hinduism.

Hinduism did not promote fraternity either. "Fraternity", says Ambedkar, "is a fellow feeling. It consists in a sentiment which leads an individual to identify himself with the good of others whereby the

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[27] B.R.Ambedkar, "The Philosophy of Hinduism", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987), Vol.3, p.25.
[28] Ibid., p.36.
[29] Ibid.,p.39.
[30] Ibid., p.41.
[31] Ibid., p.42.

good of others become to him a thing naturally and necessarily to be attended to like any of the physical conditions of ones existence."[32]The conditions for the growth of fraternity lay in the sharing of the vital processes of life. In Hinduism however, there was no such sharing. Everything was separate and exclusive.

Ambedkar concluded that "Hinduism is inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity." [33]

Ambedkar saw the institution of 'chaturvarnya' as embodying the philosophy of Hinduism. 'chaturvarnya' or caste system, Ambedkar saw as a division not just of labour but of labourers as well.. Further, they were divided into watertight compartments and arranged in a hierarchy. The system was based on a denial of individual choice and an assertion of the dogma of predestination.[34]

Hindu society was, for Ambedkar, an organised system for the domination of a small minority at the expense of the majority. Drawing a parallel between the philosophy of Nietzche, and that of Hinduism, Ambedkar held that like Nietzche, Hinduism also believed in the rule of the supermen. "The parallel to the philosophy of Hinduism is to be found in the philosophy of Nietzche."[35]He added that "Zarathustra is the new name for Manu and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is a new edition of *Manusmriti.*" [36]

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[32] Ibid., pp.64-65.
[33] Ibid., p.66.
[34] B.R.Ambedkar, "The Annihilation of Caste", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, p.48.
[35] B.R.Ambedkar, "The Philosophy of Hinduism", p.74.
[36] Ibid., p.76.

Ambedkar pointed out that the glorification of Indian civilization as ancient and as the only one which has survived the vicissitudes of time, was just shallow vanity: "The main point is, what are the merits of a civilization? The principal question is whether the social heritage of Hindu civilization, a burden or benefit? What does it offer by way of growth and expansion to classes or individuals?"[37] Ambedkar was emphatic that as far as the Untouchables were concerned, Hindu civilization had a bad record. They suffered degradation and destitution under it. "What a degradation for these unfortunate souls who have been turned by this Hindu civilization into social lepers.... What would an Untouchable say of this Hindu civilization? Would it be wrong to say that it is felony and not civilization?" [38]

Hindu social order could be destroyed only by destroying the religious basis on which it stood:

> Caste is the outcome of certain religious beliefs which have the sanction of the *Shastras*. Caste has a divine basis. You must therefore destroy the sacredness and divinity with which caste has become invested. In the last analysis, you must destroy the authority of the *Shastras* and *Vedas*.[39]

Ambedkar's diagnosis of Indian tradition/civilization profoundly influenced his politics especially his attitude towards nationalism.

Ambedkar's Nationalism

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[37] B.R.Ambedkar, "Civilization or Felony", in V.Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkara: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.5, p.136.

[38]Ibid., p.142.

[39]B.R.Ambedkar, "The Annihilation of Caste", p.69.

Ambedkar was not a nationalist in the conventional sense. His relationship with the dominant tendency (led by the Congress party) of the national movement was anything but easy. At nearly every stage of his public life, Ambedkar clashed with the Congress. To begin with, Ambedkar's demand for separate electorates for Untouchables, articulated right from 1919 and consistently held throughout his public life, made reconciliation with the Congress difficult. He cooperated with the Simon Commission (1927) when nearly every other tendency in the national movement had boycotted it. Ambedkar joined the Muslim League in celebrating 'the day of deliverance' when the Congress ministries quit office in 1939. Ambedkar became a member of Viceroy's Executive Council when Congress was at odds with the British Government. He called for co-operation with the British war efforts when the Congress gave a call to the British to 'Quit India'. He resolutely refused to resign when other Indian members of the Viceroy's Executive Council resigned following the arrest of Gandhi and other Congress leaders, in connection with the 'Quit India' movement. Not even a 21 day fast that Gandhi undertook in prison would make Ambedkar budge. Ambedkar opposed the idea of a constituent assembly for India. His proposed safeguards for minority protection veered on the extreme and he gave a veiled support for the idea of Pakistan.[40]

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[40] For details see Dhanajay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Also see Arun Shourie, *Woshipping False Gods: Ambedkar and Facts which have been Erased* (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 1998).

Ambedkar was sceptical about the narrative of nationalism, which tended to glorify the 'national typical' and the traditional. Nationalism tended to shield these from modernity. Ambedkar believed that the liberation of those oppressed under tradition lay in modernity alone.[41]

Since Ambedkar saw modernity as emancipatory, he had little hesitation in appreciating the value of even colonial modernity. Ambedkar was mindful of the fact that his own caste, the Mahars, had benefited from their association with the British, especially as soldiers of the Raj:

> In the army of the East India Company there prevailed the system of compulsory education of Indian soldiers and their children, both male and female. The education received by Untouchables in the army while it was open to them, gave them an advantage they never had before. It gave them a new vision and value. They become conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but a stigma imposed on their personality by the connivance of the priest. [42]

Ambedkar's father and grandfather were both military men. Growing up in military cantonments, Ambedkar got access to education and though he did experience discrimination, he was never locked into the village pattern of traditional work and status.[43]

Just before Ambedkar's birth (1891), the recruitment of Mhahars into the British Indian army had been terminated. One of Ambedkar's consistent demands throughout his public life was to re-

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[41] Gopal Guru, "Understanding Ambedkar's Construction of National Movement", *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 24, 1998), pp.156-157.
[42] B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, p.189.
[43]Elanor Zelliot, "The Social and Political Thought of B.R. Ambedkar", pp.160-161.

start the recruitment of Untouchables to the army. This had significance beyond the prospect for jobs. Ambedkar, it is very clear, could appreciate the benefits of colonial modernity and his nationalism did not stand in the way of accepting those benefits.

Ambedkar even in his dress and deportment tried to be modern (western). He always wore expensive Western style clothing.[44] While Gandhi's peasant garb sought to project his ties with an age old tradition, Ambedkar's apparel sought to convey the message that in modernity alone, lay the salvation of Untouchables.[45]

Ambedkar's main complaint against nationalism of the Congress Party was that it was uncritically glorifying traditions. If nationalism meant going back to traditions and Hindu religion, Ambedkar possibly could have nothing to do with it. Ambedkar pointed out repeatedly that under Congress, the trend was towards social conservatism. He correctly understood the proclivity of nationalism to protect the traditional order as the sovereign national cultural sphere. In his deposition before the Southborough Committee (1919), Ambedkar said:

> "The trend of nationalism does not warrant us to believe that the few who are sympathetic will grow in volume.... With the growth of political agitation, the agitation for social reform has subsided or even vanished.... Nationalism may lead to the justification and conservation of class interests and instead of creating liberators of the downtrodden, it may create champions of the past and the supporters of status quo." [46]

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[44] Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission, Chapter 25.*

[45] Elanor Zelliot, "The Leadership of Babasaheb Ambedkar", in *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, pp.59-61.

[46] B.R. Ambedkar, "Evidence before the Southborough Committee", p.286.

In his essay, " Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah", Ambedkar argued that the general trend in nationalism was liberalism in political matters and 'toryism' (social conservatism) in social affairs. He regarded such a tendency as dangerous and felt that it meant replacing one kind of slavery with another.[47]

Nationalism of the Congress kind, Ambedkar feared was a subterfuge to revive Hindu domination. "The Hindu Communal majority is the backbone of the Congress. It is made up of Hindus and is fed by Hindus. It is this majority which constitutes the clientele of the Congress and the Congress is bound to protect it." [48]

Any revival of Hindu domination would be disastrous for the Untouchables because "the Hindu Communal Raj is dominated by the dogma which recognises not merely inequality but graded inequality as the rule governing the inter relationship of various communities." [49]

Ambedkar saw Gandhi's social philosophy as epitomising all that was bad in nationalism. He believed that only modernity and industrialization could lead to production large enough to relieve men of a life of drudgery. This would give working-men leisure to cultivate reason and would allow them a life of human dignity rather than a brutish life. Gandhi, Ambedkar felt, by opposing industry and urbanization wanted a pre-modern society where the majority

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[47] B.R. Ambedkar, "Ranade, Gandhi, Jinnah, in V. Moon Ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, pp.210-241.
[48] B.R. Ambedkar, *What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, p.178.
[49] Ibid., p.170.

remained tied to a life of necessity and a minority benefited from their efforts. A caste society alone would support such a system.[50]

Ambedkar viewed Gandhism as obscurantist, anti-modern and anti-democratic. His verdict on Gandhism was a verdict on nationalism itself:

> Gandhism is a paradox. It stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of existing political structures of the country. At the same time, it seeks to maintain intact social structures which permit the domination of one class by another on hereditary basis which means a perpetual domination of one class by another.[51]

Ambedkar rejected the primordialist or cultural-nationalist idea that India had always been a nation. For Ambedkar, the traditional Indian society, caste ridden as it was, prevented a nation from emerging in India:

> Hindu society is a myth.... It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence. Its survival is the be all and end all of its existence. Castes do not even form a federation. [Each Caste] endeavours to segregate itself and distinguish itself from other castes.... There is an utter lack among Hindus of what sociologists call 'consciousness of kind'. That is the reason why Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation. [52]

It has to be said that although Ambedkar rejected culturalist/nationalist tendencies in Indian nationalism, he was not opposed to nationalism of a modern kind. Ambedkar felt that a nation was a fraternity established by free and equal individuals sharing a culture. A culture which respected hierarchies and gradations could not possibly be a nation. A nation emerges when power is

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[50].Ibid., p.283.
[51].Ibid., pp.290-291.
[52] B.R. Ambedkar, "The Annihilation of Caste", p.54

homogenised within culture. So Ambedkar's struggle to get rid of the traditional hierarchies in Indian society was, in the true sense of the word, a struggle for the nation.[53]

Nationalism for Ambedkar was "a social feeling.... a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those charged with it feel that they are kith and kin."[54]

A nation for Ambedkar could emerge only in a perfectly democratic society. Democracy was for him not merely a form of government. It was primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communication and experience and was incompatible with isolation and exclusion resulting from distinctions between the privileged and the underprivileged.[55] G. Aloysius expresses Ambedkar's idea of the Nation succinctly:

> Nation for Ambedkar is a new form of social and societal relationship built on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. Nationalism is a call given to abolish the Brahmanic ideology of privileges and discrimination embodied in tradition and religion as reinvented by cultural nationalists. [56]

Ambedkar's actual position vis-à-vis the national movement reflected his views of on nationalism. Ambedkar was one of the first Untouchable leaders to break with the tradition of supporting British rule. At the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar called for responsible government for India:

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[53] G.Aloysius, *Nationalism Without a Nation in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 150-154. Also see Gail Omvedt, "Searching for the Indian Nation", *Economic and Political Weekly* (August 2, 1997), pp 1966-1967.
[54] B.R.Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition,* in V. Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writtings and Speeches* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990), Vol.9, p.31.
[55] G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India,* p.154.
[56] Ibid., p.154.

> We must have a government in which men in power knowing where obedience will end and resistance will begin, will not be afraid to amend social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently call for. This role the British government will never be able to play. It is only a government which is, of the people, for the people, and by the people, that will make this possible.[57]

But at the same time, he insisted that a responsible government should not mean merely a change of masters.

Ambedkar wrote that "Free India is not enough. Free India should be made safe for democracy. If no provision is made in the Constitution to cut the fangs of Hindu communal majority, India will not be safe for democracy." [58] As pointed out, democracy was, for Ambedkar a basic condition for the emergence of the nation.

Ambedkar's fear that nationalism was turning into revivalism, Hindu domination and majoritarianism made him call for safeguards to protect democracy. Ambedkar wrote:

> Unfortunately for the minorities in India, Indian nationalism has developed a new doctrine which may be called the divine right of the majority to rule the minorities according to the wishes of the majority. Any claim for the sharing of power by the minority is called communalism, while monopolising of the whole power by the majority is called nationalism. [59]

Ambedkar's views on nationalism remained unchanged even after independence. Speaking in the Constituent Assembly, after the passage of the draft constitution Ambedkar said:

> ... in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not as yet a nation in

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[57] B. R. Ambedkar, "Ambedkar at the Round Table conference", in V. Moon ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.2, p.505.
[58] B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, p.169.
[59] B.R. Ambedkar, "States and Minorities", p.414.

> the social and psychological sense of the word, the better for us. For then only we shall realize the necessity of becoming a nation and seriously think of ways and means of realizing that goal.[60]

Conclusion

Unlike most other leaders of the national movement, Ambedkar came from an underprivileged background. He knew that traditional society had none of the romance, which cultural nationalists tended to attribute to it. With his conviction that modernity alone could liberate the backward castes of India, Ambedkar probed and critiqued conventional ideas of nationalism. Nationalism he felt, should not aim at the construction of a cultural community which prides itself merely on its distinctiveness, and alterity. Being a modernist, Ambedkar argued that a civilization or culture, before it could become a nation should get rid of all attributes within it which hampered human fraternity. Therefore a nation need not be a fellowship of abstract individuals. It could be a cultural community, provided the culture is a democratic one.

[60] Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. XI, P.980.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The substantial part of this dissertation deals with the tension between values of modernity and commitment to cultural norms that spring from nationalism, in the ideas of three prominent figures of Indian national movement. This discussion, although concerned specifically with the Indian situation, still raises two larger and related questions: (1) can there be modernity, which is trans-cultural? And (2) whether there could be a nation, which is not a cultural community, but is a fraternity of free, self determining individuals?

Nationalism is made possible by the material and the normative conditions of modernity. Yet, once it is conceptualised, the nation effectively becomes a cultural community and keeps away the normative dimensions of modernity, on the ground that these values are rooted in a certain cultural milieu and cannot be applied in the distinctive cultural community of the nation.

Coming to the first question, it can be said that the normative dimensions of modernity can be separated from what Javeed Alam calls, 'entrenched modernity'.[1] This is just one version, (although in popular imagination, the only version) of modernity, and can be traced back to the period of 'Enlightenment'. This version of modernity involves a commitment to an abstract notion of individual rationality;

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[1] Javeed Alam, *India: Living with Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.30.

rejection of religion; a deep suspicion of non-rational social relations and a refusal to grant to cultural differences, which do not conform to its rationality, any respect and dignity. This kind of modernity, Alam points out, is historically limited and can claim no universal applicability.[2]

Acceptance of the values of modernity,[3] eminently desirable, does not require the acceptance of 'entrenched modernity'. Normative modernity requires only the acceptance of the idea that individuated persons deserve dignity and equal concern from all others. Ideas like egalitarianism and liberty follow.[4] This aspect of modernity can very well exist in traditional cultural are situations. Some traditional cultures are more receptive to the ideas of modernity, Confucian China for instance, than others. In other traditional cultures the imperative of modernity calls for changes in traditional social structures and practices. It has to be said that, values of modernity represent a universal urge of our times and saying 'no' to them on the ground of cultural alterity is 'orientalism' in reverse.[5] In other words, a context bound and engaged modernity is possible and there is no need to separate modernity from material and cultural practices.

The second question is related to the first. It has been argued in this dissertation that nationalism is essentially a new kind of solidarity of men and women which springs not from any similarity of ascriptive identity but from the consciousness of men and women as

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[2] Ibid., pp.35-41.
[3] See Chapter 2 for details.
[4] Javeed Alam, *India: Living with Modernity*, p.221.
[5] Ibid., p.61.

equal, free individuals worthy of respect. Modernity allows a fraternity, which is 'made' rather than 'given', a fraternity informed by the ethic of freedom. Binding together such a fraternity is citizenship, not culture. Although this is very close to the modern idea of civil society or public sphere, what distinguishes the modern nation from the aforesaid spheres is the fact that nation unlike civil society or public sphere, is a community.[6]

The original modern, 'republican' idea of the nation gets overlaid by 'culturalist' or 'nationalist' ideas of the nation. Such ideas attribute national solidarity not to an act of will but to some primordial cultural bonds. The emergence of 'nationalist' ideas of the nation over and above the 'republican' idea could be due to the nation's existence as a community. There is certainly a tension between nationalist and republican ideas of the nation. While the latter espouses universal human values, the former espouses particularistic cultural values. We saw, however, that values of modernity can fit into traditions and that traditional values need not be completely at odds with their modern counterparts. The tension can be solved if the 'nationalist' principle of the nation is used not to subvert the 'republican' ideal of the nation, but to contextualise it.[7]

The answer to the second question therefore, is that nations can and should strive to exit as solidarities of free and equal individuals

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[6] Dipankar Gupta, *Culture, Space and the Nation State* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000), pp.188-191.

[7] Jurgen Habermas, "The European Nation State, Its Achievements and Limits: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship", in Gopal Balakrishanan ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1990), pp.284-290.

where cultural similarity is secondary to national cohesion. Now, even if the 'republican' ideal of the nation gets overlaid by 'nationalist' ideals, the former should not be subverted.

Tagore in his great essay on nationalism argued that nation isthe aspect of a people as an organized power. He felt that when a people are organized into a nation, individual agency and integrity get sacrificed for national solidarity and purpose. [8] Tagore preferred the organization of people not as nations but as civilizations. When people are civilizational entities, exchange of values can take place freely between civilizations. He felt that the sprit of modernity should be accepted by civilizations of the East. To him, modernity was not to be mistaken for its external attributes .The spirit of modernity, Tagore suggested, involves freedom of mind, independence of thought and action and scientific outlook. Tagore argued that when people are organized into nations, they are unable to accept modernity in its true spirit but end up imitating its external forms.[9]

Tagore's essay is extremely insightful. His idea of 'people as civilization' is close to the 'republican' idea of the nation, an idea which respects the uniqueness and integrity of individuals. Tagore's idea of 'people as nations' is more or less similar to the 'nationalist' idea of the nation which is blind to individual peculiarities.

The three figures discussed in this dissertation were struggling between nationalism and modernity. Except for Gandhi, none rejected

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[8] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1936), p.110.
[9]Ibid., p.75.

modernity altogether. Even Gandhi was prepared to accept its more salient aspects. It can be said that Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar were struggling to evolve a more context bound and engaged modernity. They might not have articulated it openly, but their ideas give us enough clues to make such a conclusion.

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