Introduction
Communalism, as we proceed to understand in the following pages, is both a phenomenon as well as an ideological construct. As an ideological construct it provides a coherent world-view to the phenomenon. In the Indian context, it has been conceptualised as reflecting an entire gamut of beliefs and sets of ideas. As a politics based on those beliefs, communalism identifies the socio-economic and political interests of an individual or a group on the basis of its association with a particular community, which is defined by, and constructed around, a particular religion. The satisfaction of those interests calls for a politics based on this community identity.

The distinctively Indian (or South Asian) connotation of the term communalism has been due to the variance in conceptualising certain social realities in different societies at particular historical junctures. This is in contrast to its definition in the West, particularly in Germany, where the recent historical writings have used communalism as a term to "designate attempts to achieve autonomous self-government in town and country during the reformation period". In its European context the term "draws on an older historiographical tradition which stressed an inherent dualism at all levels of constitutional development between a corporate principle and one based on domination (herrshaft). The former was founded on the equality of all members sharing common rights and obligations in a form of collective association". It, therefore, connoted a

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2. Ibid. The historians in Europe saw conditions for peasant resistance and democratisation being created by 'communalism'. Peter Blickle, a historian of Modern German history, has tried to present 'communalism' as a phenomenon applicable to the early modern period as a whole, and as a preliminary stage to a process of future 'democratisation'. See Blickle, Peter, and Kunisch, Johannes, 'Communal Reformation and Peasant Pity: The Peasant Reformation and its late Medieval Origins', Central European History, XX, 1987, pp. 216-228.

Jerome Blum and David Sabean also saw the existence of strong 'communal' forms as the precondition for active peasant resistance to the State. See Sabean, 'The Communal basis of pre-1800 risings in Western Europe', Comparative Politics, VIII, 1976, pp. 355-364; Power in the blood. Popular Culture and Village discourse in Early Modern Germany, Cambridge
positive phenomenon which strove for the common good, and as such, justified communal functions like administration of justice, common economic functions like distribution of common land, administration of church finances, etc., while simultaneously legitimising the subordination of "all individual self interest (eigen nutz)" to the ideal of "common good (gemein nutz)".\(^3\)

No definition of a concept, as understood through social realities, is entirely arbitrary. When a subject like communalism is discussed in the Indian situation, whose historical antecedents necessarily bring nationalism and colonialism into the ambit of the historian's probe, the concept becomes heavily charged with political connotations. Therefore, even as communalism is a lived and intensely contested reality, it has been the subject of historiographical debate as intense and loaded with 'connotations' given the manner in which it has affected the social and political structures. The post-Partition period has witnessed a spate of writings on communalism and communal riots. They can generally be characterised as denoting three particular trends, which not only characterise the historiographical approaches in writing and conceptualisation, but, at a subterranean level, demonstrate the ideological positioning of scholars on the issue.

The first variant consists of the writings of those historians who find that there is nothing new about politics based on communalism. For this group of writers, in such a shapeless country with its jumble of societies such as India, politics had always been structured around religion, caste, community or factions, and motivated by 'self interests'. Fractured in so many ways, and united by the enlightened British empire, a


\(^3\) *Ibid.*
coherent and united ideology like nationalism (Indian) or nationalism (the two nation theory of the Muslim League) could not take root easily. Hence, Anil Seal argued.

In so shapeless, so jumbled a bundle of societies, there were not two nations, there was not one nation, there was no nation at all. What was India? - a graveyard of old nationalities and the mother of new nationalisms struggling to be born.4

Indian society and history provide these writers with a past, whose every layer unfolds the existence of communities defined by religion and other such primordial loyalties, and their mutual relationships. At times of antagonism, these relationships, according to this view, were marked by processes which fit the description of the concept of communalism. Communalism is seen as a phenomenon which existed since time immemorial, because it provided the only means for the pluralities or religious groups to interact with, as well as counteract, each other. Therefore, they conclude that the phenomenon of communalism is not modern at all.5

In a renewed effort at excavation, Christopher Bayly, emphasises this faith, ostensibly in the name of resurrection of the agency. He suggests that many conflicts in the period 1700-1850 bear close resemblance to the communal riots that took place during the late 19th and 20th centuries.6 Quoting examples from the land wars and the acts of indigenous states, such as that of the Sikhs and Marathas, he attempts to attack some of the assumptions held by a large number of Indian historians:

If religious revitalisation did not necessarily give rise to religious conflict or communal conflict it is also the case that the widespread Hindu Muslim symbiosis of the pre-

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colonial and early colonial periods did not totally exclude the possibility of riot and disturbance along communal lines.  

Criticising the assumption that "communal violence was an export from the towns and that the syncretism of rural religion excluded the possibility of communal violence". Bayly concludes that neither "communal violence was incompatible with eclectic religious practices as the orthodox nationalist view of communalism has so often contended", nor is there "ground to assume that communal violence in the countryside was only an export from the town in the course of late nineteenth or twentieth centuries".  

By arguing that "analyses of consciousness seem to lead nowhere if taken out of context", he arrives at the conclusion that "the 'land wars' of the 18th century which saw the rise of agrarian Hindu and Sikh peasantry against Muslim rural gentry were apparently no more or no less communal than the riots in eastern U. P. in 1920s or in eastern Bengal in the 1930s and 1940s".  

Though Bayly disclaims that he postulates any "teleology by which the conflicts of this period broaden out to provide the background for Muslim or Hindu-Sikh contentions in the late 19th and 20th centuries"11, the contradictions in his argument are apparent when he sends the 'context' into oblivion, and then teleologically digs out the pre-history of communalism. If the attacks on the Muslim rural gentry in 1700 are the same as, for example, the attacks on Hindu landlords by Muslim peasantry at Noakhali in

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7 Ibid., p. 180.
8 Ibid., p. 193.
9 Ibid., p. 203.
11 Ibid., p. 190.
1946, then Bayly fails to provide 'meaning', which he asserts is his intention, to the events of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is difficult for one to equate the breaking of mosques in 1700 by Hindu peasantry, with the desecration of temples by Muslim peasantry in 1946, or the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992. Not only, as Gyan Pandey pointed out while criticising this argument, did two All India communities come up in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries giving new meaning to the concept of community, but also there was a change in the political content which motivated people to attack each other. This is because the contexts were drastically different. Therefore, ignoring the 'culture of politics', as Romila Thapar terms it, of the particular age / period, Bayly commits violence to his own mission, in an attempt to resurrect 'agency' by analysing the contexts.

Thus, communalism is interpreted by this group of historians as a normal, not uncommon, strife between religious groups. This interpretation helps these historians to overcome the problem of the presence of the colonial context, and the historical experience of a substantial section of humanity as colonial subjects. It is the control of the administrative and other state apparatuses, the politics of the colonial state as negotiating between the communities to safeguard its own interests, and the larger interests of the British colonialism which constituted the colonial context. However, the

12 Pandey, Gyanendra, *Construction of Communalism in colonial North India*. OUP, Delhi, 1990, pp. 15-16.


14 Works of Sandria Freitag and Warren Fusfield have, in a modified version, reproduced the same thesis that communalism is just the new form of the old 'religious conflict' now being performed in the new theatres, public arenas and other spaces provided by the colonial state. See, Freitag, Sandria, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, OUP, Delhi, 1990; Fusfield, Warren, 'Communal Conflict in Delhi, 1803-1930', *IESHR*, xix, 2, pp. 181-200.
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writings of this variant find in communalism a convenient instrument to erase the crucial impact of the colonial intervention.

The second variant of writers regard communalism as a modern phenomenon, a consequence of the emergence of modern politics which, according to Bipan Chandra, one of the chief representatives of this variant, marked a sharp break with the politics of ancient and medieval or pre-1857 period. Situating communalism within the overarching colonial context, these scholars refute the notion that it was a part and parcel of India's hoary past, existing for centuries. Instead, its emergence is located in the context of the British colonial impact, and the response of different Indian social classes, strata and groups to this factor.

A major post-partition work on the topic is that of A. R. Desai. Working under orthodox Marxist moorings, Desai defined communalism as

only the disguised expression of the struggle between the vested interests belonging to different faiths who gave a communal form to that struggle. It also was the form within which the struggle of the professional classes of different communities over posts and seats carried on.

Therefore, in the final analysis, communal strife was a middle-class inspired struggle. A similar view has been expressed by Asghar Ali Engineer and Moin Shakir. They see communalism as a product of the weaknesses and imbalances in the economy created by the capitalist system. The unequal economic forces led the Muslim middle-

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18 Of Engineer's numerous writings I have taken his Communalism and Communal Violence in India, Allied Publishers, Delhi, 1989, as his representative work. See also, Shakir, Moin, Khilafat to Partition: A Survey of Major Political Trends among Indian Muslims during 1919-1947, Kalamkar Prakashan, Delhi, 1970.
class to lag behind their Hindu counterpart. They began to feel uncomfortable given the entire capitalist scenario, and hence, gradually shifted towards those parties that were demanding a separate homeland for Muslims.

Engineer and Shakir have both extensively studied the post-partition communal conflict situation. Engineer concludes that, "communalism like ethnicity has existed since time immemorial in the form of prejudices and it is very much in keeping with human nature. However, we should not confuse these ethnic and communal prejudices with present day communal conflicts". Engineer and a host of others who study the riot accounts suffer from this typical empiricist dilemma. This is due to the fact that they derive the definition from their field work which leaves an overwhelming impression on their views, and colours their understanding of communalism.

Prabha Dixit, too, finds communalism a modern phenomenon. It is a political doctrine that makes use of religio-cultural differences and awareness, and turns these into communalism in the form of a political doctrine. This deliberate choice, however, she argues, is not made by the community per se, but by the elite of that community. Thus, "communalism is a consciously conceived political doctrine of one section of traditional elites". Locating herself in the tradition-modernity model, she opines that the Muslim elite, who were lagging behind in the race for modernisation, took to safeguarding their interests. Even when some modernisation occurred, as in the form of Syed Ahmad's efforts, these were superficial. She says:

The modernisation of the Muslim community as heralded by Sir Syed Ahmad was not the modernisation of the whole community, but the superficial modernisation of the upper

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19 Engineer, Asghar Ali, op. cit., p. 5.


21 Ibid., p. 3.
class Muslims. The modernisation introduced in this manner was not aimed at creating an intellectual or social revolution. Its sole aim was preservation of the old order."

According to her, communalism firstly originated among the Muslim elite, and hence, they were the original sinners. Dixit's explanation for the emergence of Hindu communalism is that it originated as a reaction to Muslim communalism.

Combining elite-power relationship and the tradition-modernisation model, Prabha Dixit states that communalism is a political doctrine that makes use of religio-cultural differences and awareness, and turns them into communalism in the form of a political doctrine. The failure to sufficiently modernise itself, she argues, found the Muslim elite in the long run ill-disposed to adopt democratic principles and institutions. Since nationalism in India symbolised democratic institutions and egalitarian principles, the backward/lagged-behind elite did not want to accept them.

If for Dixit communalism is an anti-democratic and anti-modern phenomenon, for Bipan Chandra it is reaction *par excellence*. For him, it was a middle-class, petty-bourgeois phenomenon, product of the unique socio-economic and political situation of colonial India. He views communalism as a "belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic

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Muslim communalism did not arise as a reaction to Hindu communalism. Hindu communalism on the other hand grew as a reaction to Muslim communalism.


However, Bipan Chandra criticises this argument because for him by "assigning the blame or the original sin to the opposite communalism, a sort of back-door justification was provided for one's own communalism or the communalism one is studying or supporting".


24 He says, in the wider historical perspective, communalism was an extreme form of reaction, as is also brought out by the role of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha in politics. Communalism was a major weapon of political, social and economic reaction in the modern period that has to be 'fought on all fronts and given no quarter'.

Chandra, Bipan, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
interests. It is the belief that in India, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs form different and distinct communities which are independently and separately structured or consolidated... that, in fact, each religious 'community' constitutes a homogenous entity and even a distinct society in itself".  

For Bipan Chandra, ideology and consciousness, which help people to take subjective cognition of objective realities, are crucial for understanding communalism. Communalism is a 'false consciousness', as it presents reality in a distorted form. This false consciousness fills in gaps created by the inadequate development of true consciousness. This inadequacy is evinced by the failure to develop a national consciousness, and linguistic-cultural and class identities.  

His concept of false consciousness, like his analysis of communalism itself, proceeds along with the counterparts, viz., true consciousness and Nationalism. If communalism was false consciousness, then Nationalism was the true consciousness. "It was historically valid at the moment as it provided a real solution to a real problem - national liberation against colonial domination." 

Randhir Singh, the Marxist political theorist, criticises this point of view because of its failure in "theorising communalism" and for "legitimising the state". He criticises Bipan Chandra for providing an alibi to the ruling class for its failures. "Nationalism", in his opinion, "serves to cover up or provide alibis for the historic default or the failure of the post-colonial class in India and increasingly turns into a legitimising ideology for the

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26 Ibid., pp. 18-28.
27 Ibid., pp. 23-24.
new social order or powers that be". He sees two basic flaws, i.e., ideological and methodological, in the writings of contemporary historians and theorists of communalism. Ideologically they are flawed because they understand it from the standpoint of Nationalism, while methodologically they have studied contemporary communalism in an essentially empiricist and often ahistorical manner.

His critique is primarily based on his need for, in his words, a theory and practice that will help articulate struggles against communalism with the class struggle. Similarly, "a critique of religion and of the inter-related phenomenon of revivalism, fundamentalism and communalism especially as it is an escape into, or aggressive assertion of, an identity based on religion, must become the critique of the society that makes the religion".

Kanthi Singh, thus, pins his hopes on a socialist transformation to wage the war against communalism.

Achin Vanaik, on the other hand, studies the limits of 'false consciousness' as proposed by Bipan Chandra. According to him, the concept has some merit in that it

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29 Ibid., p. 1543.
30 Ibid., p. 1542.
31 Ibid., p. 1543.
32 He says:
   The struggle against communalism and for secularism in India today has to be understood and waged as a part of the over all revolutionary struggle for socialism in India.
   Ibid., p. 1548.
33 Vanaik, Achin, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India*, Verso, London and New York, 1990. His criticism of Bipan Chandra is that though the latter "asserts that communalism is the politics of religious identity, but the question of importance of religious identity, its formation and meaning is never incorporated in any sustained way into his analysis". Ibid., p. 154.
   If one incorporates all these, as Vanaik suggests, one may have an explanation on the following lines:
   To sum up, I am suggesting that the rise of communalism should perhaps be seen in relation to the long standing separateness of the religious networks, the acute social distance expressing a high level of social antagonism between Muslims and Hindus,
tells us that "certain barriers exist in the true subjective perception of the structural character of capitalist relations"\textsuperscript{34}, or that there is some true objective reality existing. However, he critiques it for "the concept cannot explain why these barriers exist and why they remain so powerful which is surely a theoretical prerequisite for removing them in practice".\textsuperscript{35}

Tracing the growth of communalism in India, Vanaik identifies the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century as the chief culprit because it was embedded with strong Hindu symbols. He labels Indian Nationalism as a Hindu one. He counterposes this Nationalism and the post-Independence Indian state to the European nation states. He concludes that while the latter, prior to their emergence, went through a period of secularisation, the Indian state, a product of the culmination of the national movement, inherited the predominantly religious colour which had marked the national movement.

Indian civil society also never underwent a process of secularisation. Within this context, he defines communalism as "a process involving competitive desecularisation in a religiously plural society - that in a competitive striving to extend the reach of religion through ideology and control institutions - which along with non-religious factors helps to harden divisions between different religious communities and increase tension between them"\textsuperscript{36}.

\textsuperscript{34} Vanaik, Achin. \textit{op. cit.}, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 154.
The theoretical merit of this definition is that unlike other Marxist writings it does not side-track or dilute the importance of religion in shaping communalism. But the study, as well as the tools of analysis through which Vanaik reaches this conclusion, is informed by a lack of sensitivity to the strong secular current of the national movement. This traps him into overlapping and confusing Hindu revivalism, Hindu fundamentalism and Hindu communalism within the contours of Indian Nationalism.\(^37\)

The major arena of debate among the authors of this variant centres on the question of a way out of this problem.

Desai, writing in the late forties and early fifties, saw the problem rooted in the capitalist epoch itself:

In countries where due to historical reasons, a centralised state came into existence before the whole mass of people whom it governed was transmuted into a well-knit nation, living a common economic life... as a result of the capitalist economic development, the problem did arise in the course of historical development.\(^38\)

But this seems to be an evaluation rather than an explanation because it does not explain why the problem arose in the form of communalism, and that too only through the use of religion.

The solution Desai prescribes is to "unite the lower strata of different communities for securing their economic and other interests". Thus, if communalism is a distorted version of class division, "to combat it effectively" one has to bring in a "class consciousness" among the lower classes.\(^39\)

Writing in the wake of the re-emergence of the communal forces in the seventies and early eighties, Bipan Chandra realised the strong ideological content in communalism


and the imperative to fight it at the ideological plane. He says that to "combat communalism is to create and propagate the counter ideology". This has to be a simultaneous process, along with the efforts at social transformation. However, communal consciousness has to be fought at the level of ideology.

Since objective conditions feed the false consciousness of communalism, to successfully oppose communalism it is necessary to eliminate the social conditions favouring its growth, i.e., to liquidate its social roots by bringing about fundamental changes in the social system. Capitalism, for him, can no longer bring about conditions favourable for national unity; this unity can only be maintained and strengthened by striving for a socialist transformation of society. Here he provides what Randhir Singh has been asking for - a critique of the social system. However, unlike the latter who is searching for an ideology to fight communalism, Bipan Chandra provides one. The counter ideology "is to be a continuing phenomenon along with the fight for the transformation of the society. The war should be waged on a synchronous time framework and at different levels".

Vanaik, setting out to critique Bipan Chandra's alternative, comes to the same conclusion though using a different phraseology. Setting an agenda for the Marxist Socialists, he argues that "it would be unmaterialist to imagine that collective religious identities might be easily replaced by other collective identities (class, for example) without some prior construction of an alternative working-class and socialist culture rooted in the everyday existence of the oppressed".

40 Chandra, Bipan, op. cit., pp. 310-335. Unlike Engineer, Bipan Chandra does not want to give way to the feeling of helplessness, and opposing it says that "in facing the communal challenge, the starting point has to be the realisation that the way out is going to be a long haul". Ibid., p. 310.

41 Ibid.
This is what Vanaik claims is the Marxist remedy, as different from the 'liberal model' of Bipan Chandra's.\(^{43}\) He advocates a fight for the secularisation of the Indian state, and the development of alternative sources of defence and principled militant violence against communal violence.\(^{44}\) Despite his repeated emphasis on socialist culture, activity and methods, Vanaik never develops a critique of the capitalist system which in any final analysis nurtures and sustains communalism within its ambit.

Engineer, on the other hand, is convinced of the incorrigible nature of communal conflicts, and he seems a bit resigned to this fact.\(^{45}\) He sees capitalist development with its imbalanced growth as the major cause of communal problems. The macro-level cause of the communal problem in the economic arena is that "Muslims are left out in the process of economic development and the Hindus mainly benefit from it".\(^{46}\) This again brings to the fore Engineer's empiricist dilemma combined with an extremely superficial economic generalisation.

Similarly, in his micro-level analysis, unbalanced economic growth of one community creates situations inducing violence by the other, be it in Meerut, Bhiwandi, or Ahmedabad. This follows from Engineer's view that violence is an "integral part of

\(^{42}\) Vanaik, Achin, *op. cit.*, p. 159.


\(^{45}\) His logic is that the "final solution is too complex to easily yield to any solution. The dynamics of capitalist development are such that communal violence cannot be contained in our society. We will have to live both with communalism and communal violence for quite some time to come. We can however certainly try to reduce it". Engineer, Asghar Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Here, what I see is the empiricist ever. For him 'communalism' becomes a given social fact and one has just to explain it rather than try to transcend the fact by applying a rigorous analysis. He also fails to separate communalism and communal conflicts, and he uses them quite interchangeably.

development. In the capitalist system it takes place on ethnic and community lines while in the socialist system in class terms. Development in South Asia has been taking place in capitalist form, hence communal violence.”

Is class struggle then a part of the socialist system of development? Whereas in its ideal-typical form, the socialist system of development presupposes the solution of class struggle by creating a classless society. Similarly, it is primarily in the capitalist system that classes emerge and class struggle takes place to solve the dialectics of exploitation. Engineer is not able to analyse the roots of economic imbalance which for him is the sole / basic cause of communal violence. He uses capitalist system, capitalist model of growth, etc., quite interchangeably, while on the other hand communalism and communal violence become synonymous for him. This prevents him from transcending the empiricist dilemma we have talked about earlier. The economism which characterised the conceptualisation of communalism by writers like Engineer has made the ‘modernisation’ theory vulnerable to attacks by those who have attempted to take the discourse to the debate on modernity.

The third variant of historians advocate an altered periodisation of Indian History i.e., pre-modernity and modernity, in an attempt at restoring agency to the voices

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48 There is a general agreement on the distinctive signs of modernity - an industrial society dominated by technology; and on the main characteristics of post-industrial society - typified by the primacy of knowledge. Modernity, for many, defines the modern phase as one that began with the philosophical foundations of an industrial society based on reason, rationalisation and differentiation. Modernisation, in this context, came to give meaning to the process of transformation to this modern, and to many, post-industrial phase, from the pre-industrial stage characterised by cohesion and lack of differentiation. The ideology of Progress, it has generally been held, was embedded in this process of transformation. Modernisation, Modernity and the ideology of Progress are, therefore, the crucial elements in the chain. The theorists of the Frankfurt school, namely, T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, saw modernisation as the triumph of ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’. And therefore, these (reason and rationality) were to be critically examined in order to find out ‘the ills that these concepts brought’. Adorno, T. W., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Allen Lane, London, 1973; Horkheimer,
which remained suppressed. Communalism in their conceptualisation is, among other things, primarily a construction in/of knowledge, and this construction is founded on the Enlightenment induced paradigms of knowledge. Partha Chatterjee argues that it was the nationalist discourse which, apart from providing the knowledge structure to the

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Reason and rationality, and the social organisation built upon these attributes of the modern phase, has had its non-Marxist and conservative critics too. Heidegger, Spengler, and Moeller van den Bruck can be named as the most ardent critics of Modernity, with rationality as the cornerstone of modern society. See Stern, Fritz, The Politics of Cultural despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961, for a brilliant portrayal of the reaction against modernity.

Gradually, this critical appraisal of reason, which it was agreed, was crucial in the entire process of bringing modern conditions, gave way to consistent attacks on Modernity, Modernisation and the idea of Progress. These attacks initially came from the scholars of the Frankfurt School, who, working on the epistemological foundations of Marxism, tried to present a critique of Capitalist Modernity. From 1923, when it began, to the days of Horkheimer and Adorno in the 40s and 50s, and of Habermas in the 70s, the theorists have gradually moved away from orthodox, often even Marxist, positions which also coincided with their moving away from politics. “Despite their calls for the revolutionary transformation of society” writes Kellner, “and for relating theory to practice to make social theory to practice to make social theory an instrument of emancipation, the critical theorists found themselves increasingly distanced from actual political struggles. Hence, their calls for liberation or revolution... became increasingly paradoxical. From this vantage point, Critical Theory represents a stage in the development of neo-Marxian social theories, during which radical intellectuals were separated from revolutionary social movements, while fascism steadily gained power throughout the world.” Kellner, Douglas, Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity, Polity Press, 1989, p. 50. For a critical review of the works of these theorists see, Jay, Martin, Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept From Lukacs to Habermas, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984, and Kellner, Douglas, op. cit.


The academic condemnation of ‘reason’ was concomitant with the emergence of a trend of valorisation of the popular in the name of emancipation. This came at a time when socialism was generally discredited, and there were attempts to normalise and sanitise colonialism by the neo-colonial voices. The notion of ‘post-modernity’ which is yet to find a commonly accepted definition even among its crusaders, emerged exactly at this historical juncture.

The pessimism and the politically paralysing potentials of these new trends soon got reflected in the writings on communalism in India, too. The attempts to change the agenda into questioning categories rather than giving new meanings, the efforts at valorising fragments in opposition to the meta-narratives, and the understanding of communalism and problems of nationalism by deconstructing intellectual texts, are symptomatic of these changes.
nationalist politics, defined *a particular politics* as communalism, and in this process, constructed a self-defined nationalism and politics in counterposition to 'communalism'.

Gyanendra Pandey, improvising on the argument, says that the *nationalist elite - the superordinate classes* - propagated this construction of categories, which was primarily an imposition of the colonialist, essentialist tendencies premised on the structures and paradigms of post-Enlightenment knowledge. Such knowledge also extended the category and language of representation of a particular type based on the Enlightenment rationality now in the service of colonialism. The politics based on this knowledge structure did not recognise those forms of articulation of popular resistance which were not based on this colonial (read Enlightenment, too) premise. Nationalism, it is argued, borrowed the same paradigms and foundation of knowledge structure and, in turn, suspected the politics and voices of the other. This not only helped the colonialists to impose modern categories through the nationalists, but also to legitimise the nationalist politics as the only legitimate *modern politics*. Homogenisation, these authors argue, was a cardinal characteristic of modern knowledge and, therefore, it repressed all voices of the colonised by usurping the modes and language of representation through which they could articulate their experiences and resistance.

Communalism, in this sense, was "a construction" of the Enlightenment knowledge brought to India by colonial rule. For this reason it is imperative to break, deconstruct or demystify nationalism and the historiography which provides legitimacy to nationalism in this view, so that a real attempt to understand and demystify communalism can be embarked upon.

Thus, an attack was launched on what the scholars term as nationalist historiography - an amorphous category embracing history written by Marxist, anti-
colonialist and communalist historians. Since, these historians of all hues premised their writings on reason, hierarchy of causation and acceptance of the notion of truth, they are labelled as essentially Liberal historians.

The authors of this variant argue that "communalism is a conception of bourgeois-liberal ideology", and that in the pre-independence stage, it was intrinsically linked with Nationalism, while in the post-colonial society it is a notion which derives from the self-definition of the Indian state and is, hence, inseparably tied to its counterpart, i.e., 'secularism'.

Accepting Edward Said's evocation, Partha Chatterjee seeks to identify the contradiction within the nationalist stream of thought which, "in agreeing to become modern accepts the claim of universality of this framework of knowledge" (i.e., the bourgeois-rationalist conception of knowledge established in the post-Enlightenment period of European intellectual history). In order to find out the locale of the subject and object in nationalist thought, Chatterjee examines the structure of the epistemic foundation of nationalist thought. His finding is that its contradictions are based on its very epistemic foundations, in 'modern' knowledge.

50 Ibid.
52 Chatterjee, Partha, Nationalist thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse, (hereafter, Chatterjee, c) OUP, Delhi, 1986, p. 11.
53 Dissecting the structures of knowledge into problematic and thematic categories, Chatterjee elaborates: We wish to separate the claims of an ideology, i.e., its identification of historical possibilities and the practical or programmatic forms of its realisation, from its justificatory structures, i.e., the nature of the evidence it presents in support of those claims, the rules of inference it relies on to logically relate a statement of the evidence to a structure of argument, the set of epistemological principles it uses to demonstrate the existence of its claims as historical possibilities, and finally, the set of ethical principles it appeals to in order to assert that those claims are morally justified. The
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Here Abdel Malik provides Partha Chatterjee with the characteristics of the dominant framework of nationalist knowledge, i.e., orientalist knowledge, which imposed rationalist post-Enlightenment knowledge of the West on the Orient, stamping it with an 'otherness'.

The problematic in Orientalism is one in which the orient and orientals were an object of study, stamped with an otherness.... This object of study will be, as is customary, passive non-participating endowed with a historical subjectivity, above all non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regards to itself.

Similarly, at the level of thematic, "there was an essentialist concept of the countries, nations and people of the Orient under study, a conception which expresses itself through a characterised ethnic typology...."

Applying these characteristics to his framework, Partha Chatterjee finds that the 'problematic' in nationalist thought is exactly the reverse of that of Orientalism, "that is to say the object of nationalist thought is still oriental, which retains the essentialist character depicted in orientalist discourse. Only he is not passive, non-participating".

At the thematic level, on the other hand, "Nationalist thought accepts and adopts the same essentialist conception based on the distinction between 'the east ' and 'the west', the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject, and hence the same

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former part of a social ideology we call its problematic and the latter part its thematic. The thematic, in other words, refers to an epistemological as well as ethical system which provides a framework of elements and rules for establishing relations between elements; the problematic, on the other hand, consists of concrete statements about possibilities justified by reference to the thematic.

Chatterjee, Partha, (c), ibid., p. 38.

Abdel Malik, Anouar, 'Orientalism in Crisis', *Diogenes*, 44 (Winter, 1963), pp. 102-40, as quoted in Chatterjee, Partha, (c), ibid., p. 36.

Ibid., p. 37.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 38.
objectifying procedures of knowledge constructed in the past enlightenment age of western sciences". 58

This contradiction between thematic and problematic which informs nationalist thought "signifies the theoretical insolubility of the national question in a colonial country, or for that matter, of the extended problem of social transformation in a post colonial country within a strictly nationalist framework". 59 Partha Chatterjee, therefore, in order to tackle this and other problems in nationalist thought, "breaks its presumed unity", 60 to alter the modes of discourse and match the 'thematique' with the 'problematique': In this way an onslaught can be directed towards the categories imposed by the orientalist discourse.

Similarly, Partha Chatterjee breaks an obvious event such as communalism into several constituent events, and locates each of them in a different analytical plane. 61 This is because, for him, the task is to break up and supersede the liberal problematic of 'communalism' / 'secularism'. 62 Since communalism is the "self definition of the Indian State" he does not regard "it as a problem and secularism as the answer". 63 Instead, he locates communalism in the structures of power relations where, for instance in Bengal, communalism becomes synonymous with the actions of the peasant community.

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., p. 39.
60 Ibid., p. 50.
61 Chatterjee, Partha (b), op. cit., p. liii.
62 Ibid., p. lii.
His attempts to alter the structure of discourse in nationalist thought on the basis of an attack on the liberal rationalist thought of the modern West, aims at the resurrection of 'meaning' and the 'subject'. Thus, he tries to dispel the imposed essences of the oriental discourse. That is why, he opines, the national movement has to be breached into two domains of politics, as the second domain lost its voice to the rationality of the first. In a similar vein, the first or the elite domain, in order to define itself, is seen to have created communalism as 'the other', and on the lines of the oriental discourse, imposed its own definition of communalism on the subject of the second domain.

Chatteijee's attempt to answer questions when he comes to the level of actual events proves problematic. In fact, his statement that "the crucial element which deflected the peasant agitation into an anti-Hindu movement was not that the zamindars were Hindus, and the peasants were considered part of the peasant communities whereas the Hindu Zamindars were not", ⁶⁴ begs the question - why were the Hindu Jotdars not thought of as members of the peasant community. Moreover, during the later phase of the communal attacks even Hindu peasants was treated as Hindu and not as peasants.

The answer is not available to Partha Chatteijee because, going by his own logic, the Muslim peasants by 1947 realised the possibilities inherent in the nationalist discourse and the insolubility of important issues, and therefore, taking advantage of it carved out an independent state of Pakistan. Since, for Chatterjee, communalism is a product of Bourgeois-Liberal ideology (as also nationalism and secularism), any breach of that imposed ideology is welcome. Therefore, he argues that such an event as communalism has to be studied not in relation to its counterparts - secularism or nationalism - but in its

⁶⁴ Ibid.
own right, because it helps us to understand how the object of the oriental discourse tries to assert its own autonomy and sovereignty.

The further work of resurrecting the agency, and giving the oriental object his history which had been taken out of his society and politics by the forces of colonial construction, has been taken up by Gyanendra Pandey. Pandey takes it upon himself to challenge the givenness of the categories of communalism, nationalism and, for that matter, secularism. He questions the finality and fixity of these categories, and the analytic apparatus of the dyads of communalism / nationalism, and communalism / secularism. 65

Communalism, in his construction analysis, becomes an epistemic construction. The ingredients for this construction, according to him, are provided by the bourgeois-colonialist knowledge. The Indian elite or the superordinate classes internalised these ingredients.66 On the lines of the colonial West, the nationalist elite tried to define its nationalism by defining the communal ‘other’. Thus, nationalism was what communalism was not. This construction was achieved by creating a colonial sociology which imposed essences to the Indian population. "If bourgeois ideology continuously transforms the products of history into essential types, bourgeois colonialism seems to perform this task of transformation with a vengeance and essential types, i.e., bigoted Julaha, fierce Pathan, intriguing Brahman, the turbulent Ahir and criminal Pasi are created." Pandey argues that this takes history out of reality.67

If colonialism imposed an essentialist typology, it also denied history to the people - 'the oriental objects'. The thinking of the Indian elite was in line with that of the

65 Ibid., p. 64.


67 Ibid., pp. 107-108.
colonial rulers in this respect. "Just as the colonial regime would, if it could, appropriate to itself the entire political life of the subject people, so the local elite would, if it had its way, appropriate the whole history of the local community", says Pandey. Thus, the local community is deprived of an autonomous history and politics in this argument. It simply becomes the 'irrational', the communal 'other' of the nationalists, which is embedded within modern rationality.

Pandey attempts to restore this denied autonomy, history and politics to the much maligned oriental object. This he does by deconstructing meta texts which he finds in the "riot narratives" and in the community history texts. While the communal riot narrative is a history of the state and imposed forcefully, says Pandey, by positing the community history texts vis-à-vis these riot narratives, it is possible to show how history can be contested, and how the community history is the real history which challenges the colonial history and asserts the autonomy of the oriental object, his history and life vis-à-vis the colonial construction to its contrary.

Thus, while Partha Chatterjee wants to understand communalism by breaking its monolithic construction into different analytical planes, Gyan Pandey does it by trying to give meaning to the community text and demonstrating the colonial construction of communalism.

In this attempt at representation, Pandey raises important questions, though he never answers them. Without any attempts at class analysis, he links the Indian elite to colonial power and knowledge by arguing that they have collaborated with the colonial power in imposing colonial knowledge on Indian society. Thus, Pandey transforms the

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68 Ibid., p. 150.
economic collaborationist role of the Indian Bourgeoisie as ascribed to them by the Marxist historians, into one of intellectual collaborators.

Secondly, following the line of contending histories, the real contenders, for him, are colonial history and community history, with the latter struggling to break this imposed silence. Nationalist historiography, which he somehow associates with the national movement, evaporates as it subscribes to the same bourgeois colonialist knowledge which forms the basis of colonialist historiography. In this vein, the real phenomena of nationalism and the national movement are also denied meaning and rationale in an effort to give meaning to that which opposed it; one may call this the straight way to delegitimise the hegemony of nationalism by bringing in construction analysis.

The nationalists, in their writings as well as in their politics, never thought of communalism and its politics as the 'other' or the reality that defined nationalism. It was the contest with and opposition to colonialism and its politics that gave meaning and identity to nationalism and its politics. Communalism was thought to be an obstacle in the way of realising the wider unity required to contest colonialism - if one likes, its constructions too (through nationalist history) - and thereby, oppose it.

Since 'communalism' within quotes or out of quotation marks is a problem at the level of epistemic construction, these scholars do not engage in providing any solution as such to the actual communal riots or communalism as it is manifested in these riots. Their solution is to break the totality of the term communalism in order to restore meaning and rationale for the participants in the event of supposed communal rioting. This would, according to this view, deny the imposed rationality of the post-Enlightenment discourse of reason which the colonial knowledge had imposed on the
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communities. Nationalism, also, is enmeshed with this rationality which, in fact, has done more to propagate this category, and hence, should also be breached at the level of analysis, or bypassed for the purpose of this restoration.

II

Communalism as an ideological construct

Communalism is an ideological construct, and I propose to capture the dynamics of this construct. Ideology denotes a set of attitudes and ways of behaviour which can be observed in the 'real world'. A definition of ideology represents a world-view, and, at that, an attempt to construct a coherent world-view, and therefore, as Seligar calls it, a "distinctive intellectual perspective". Communalism, as defined in the Indian context therefore, is an ideological construct as it not only denotes a set of attitudes and ways of behaviour but also provides a coherent mode of political praxis. As an ideology, the elements of communalism are always internalised by the individual and social actors, to provide them with a coherent perspective and a world view which would suggest solutions in the mind to problems which "cannot be solved in practice". However, as

69 Ashis Nandy goes further and questions the discipline of history, which has its foundation on modern rationality, of its capability of providing answer to the question of communal violence. Making a consistent critique of modernity, Nandy finds the Eurocentric reading of history creating obstacles for exploring the many histories that a civilisation like India possesses. To him, the homogenising and absolutising efforts of history, have a debilitating impact on any such efforts at exploration, which alone is a safeguard against violence. See, Nandy, Ashis. 'History's Forgotten Doubles', History and Theory, Theme Issue 34, 1995, pp. 44-66.

70 I borrow this definition from Martin Seligar who writes, "... ideology has always denoted sets of attitudes and ways of behaviour which can be observed in the real world". Seligar, Martin, Ideology and Politics, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1976, p. 15.

71 Ibid.

72 In this sense, the treatment of communalism as an ideology comes close to the Marxist understanding of ideology, as "a solution in the mind to contradictions which cannot be solved in practice; it is the necessary projection in consciousness of man's practical inabilities." Larrain, Jorge, The Concept of Ideology, Hutchinson, London. 1979, p. 46.
an ideology communalism, at the same time, retains the initiative and force of improvising itself into new forms and phases. The improvisations need not take place in the minds of the individual human actor; the structure and the operation of its inner logic are powerful enough to activate this transformation or improvisation. That is why communalism, like any other social phenomenon, defies psychoanalytical explanations. 73

I ideology, in the writings of Marx, Engels and later day Marxist thinkers like Poulantzas, is generally considered from the standpoint of the role it plays, i.e., concealing the real contradictions in the material conditions. Poulantzas writing in 1973, says:

I ideology has the precise function of hiding the real contradictions and of reconstituting on an imaginary level a relatively coherent discourse which serves as the horizon of agents' experience.... Poulantzas, N., Political Power and Social Classes, T. Hagan, (trans.), New Left Books and Sheed and Ward, London, 1973, p. 207. See, also Larrain, Jorge, op. cit., p. 46.

A psychoanalytical explanation of communalism, as in the works of Sudhir Kakar and to an extent Ashis Nandy, faces this problem acutely. This is because of the inherent problem in the discipline of psychoanalysis itself to explain larger social and group realities by postulating, as Freud did, that groups tend to act through libidinal ties to their leaders because groups undergo collective regression to an earlier mental stage dominated by a tyrannical father. The significant contributions of Erik H. Erikson, tried to break this analytical and explanatory problem with the use of new tools of analysis, like the stages in an individual life, question of identity, especially in particular phases in an individual's life cycle, etc. However, the efforts failed to go beyond attempts to understand society through a study of the minds of some leaders, and that too at a particular phase in their lives. See, Erikson, Erik H., Young Man Luther A Study in Psychoanalysis and History, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1958; Gandhi's Truth On the Origins of Militant Non-Violence, W. W. Norton, New York, 1969.

The psychohistorical approach was applied to understand the phenomena of fascism and National Socialism, and a large number of works appeared in the 70s. See, Lowenberg, Peter, 'The Psychohistorical Origins of Nazi Youth Cohort', American Historical Review, LXXVI, 1971, pp. 1457-1502; 'Psychohistorical Perspective in Modern German History', Journal of Modern History, 47, 2, 1975, pp. 229-279. For a critical review of these writings, see, 'Psychohistorical Interpretations of National Socialism', German Studies Review, 1, 2, 1978, pp. 150-172. The psychoanalytical view of history, as Lowenberg said "postulates the existence of an unconscious, which means that these are earlier levels of the mind which are no longer known to the subject and... these levels may influence behaviour.... A psychoanalytical history gives due place to the sexuality, passions and emotional states of the inner world of its subject". Lowenberg, Peter, 'Psychohistorical Perspective in Modern German History', Journal of Modern History, 47, 2, 1975, pp. 231-232.

Communalism, and particularly communal conflicts, attract the psychoanalysts to explore those inner realms which work behind these conflicts. But the failure to accept communalism as an ideology forces analysts such as Sudhir Kakar, to consider only communal conflict and violence as units of study. Introducing the subject, Kakar says, "This book is a psychoanalyst's exploration of what is commonly known as religious conflict." Kakar, Sudhir, Colours of Violence, Viking, 1995, p. VIII. It does not need much intellectual force to suggest that "it" is not commonly known as religious conflict, but as "communal conflict". This is a methodological compulsion, too, because only by reducing communal conflict to religious conflict can he apply his analytical category which operates on the basis of religion. For example, he writes: "Together with religious selfhood, the 'I-ness' of religious identity, we have a second track of We-ness which is the experience of being part of a community of believers." Ibid., p. 245.
Ideology is linked to politics no less than all politics is linked to ideology. Ideology requires politics as its mode of articulation and implementation. The political structure and processes at a particular historical juncture, therefore, are significant in shaping the articulation of communalism as well as its own transformation into new forms and new phases. This makes the understanding of the primacy of politics a corollary to that of communalism as an ideology. It is in the process of political contestation that articulation is shaped. It is the political configuration at a particular historical juncture which is the most significant factor in explaining communalism and its different manifestations at that juncture. The relevance of studying and treating communalism as an ideology becomes obvious here.

Religion, and attributes of culture such as language play an instrumental role in this context. However, when communalism enters its extreme phase these play a

It clearly shows what Mazlish said decades ago about the problems of psychological inquiry: "Psycho-historical inquiry does not offer us causal explanations, but only explanations in terms of correspondence and co-existing processes." Mazlish, Bruce, 'Group Psychology and Problem of Contemporary History', Journal of Contemporary History, 3, 2, 1968, p. 168. Therefore, psychoanalysis comes close to the requirement of "thick description" fashionable with sociologists and social anthropologists, to pass their products as works of history. It remains at the level of description and at times superficial explanation only. What Thomas A. Kohut said about psychohistory applies to the psychoanalytic approach to communalism, too. He said: "... there is no attempt at interpretation,... Even when diagnostic description has been transcended and historical interpretation attempted,... reliance on theory led to explanations, that are brittle, superficial and unconvincing... Single narrow interpretative formulations based on a psychological theory, psychohistorical studies tend to be psychologically simplistic and historically reductionist." Kohut, Thomas A., 'Psychohistory as History', American Historical Review, 2, 1986, p. 341.

It is important to locate the role of religion in the entire phenomenon of communalism, because on this role depends the distinctions between fundamentalism and communalism, between religious conflict and communal conflict.

Religion plays a central role, i.e., from defining the identity of a particular community to shaping its non-religious interests, depending on the religious identities. Its role in the process of mobilisation of people for political partisanship leads a historian of modern Indian History to write:

Religion is an integral factor in the existing state of social consciousness in our society. Religion provides an identity of being part of a community to all those who believe in the same religion have a certain common identity. It is this belief in commonality which is used for communal mobilisation or for creating conditions for communal mobilisation. That is, communalism and communal mobilisations are based on a perception (or a possibility of creating a perception) that there are identities
greater role, rather than simply playing an instrumentalist part. At this juncture, the points of difference between fundamentalism and communalism become less sharp and, at times, they converge.\(^{75}\)

This is not to suggest that religion or other cultural attributes play a secondary role. What I am proposing is that though at times their role seems the most significant and of primary import, what really happens is that these factors play a legitimising role in an atmosphere determined by communal ideology. This, however, does not mean that it is communalism which determines - what is suggested here is that communalism at a particular conjuncture becomes the determining factor.\(^{76}\)

As an ideology, communalism can hardly be divorced from 'factual knowledge'.\(^{77}\) It cannot be studied in isolation, divorced from societal realities which constitute its "context". The structures of politics and economics are the essential prerequisites of this context, and determine the structures of knowledge and ideas. Therefore, attempts to which are based on religious belonging. Such an identity, in fact, can be manipulated for purposes of power at various levels.


Fundamentalism indicates a phenomenon which asks and attempts to make the religious community to fall in line with the fundamental tenets (or the "rules of the Book") of that religion, while discarding all experiments and further developments pertaining to that religion. Communalism, on the other hand, does not ask the community to be anti-modern. For a brilliant treatment of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, see, Al-Azm, Sadik J., 'Islamic Fundamentalism Reconsidered: A critical outline of Problems, Ideas and Approaches, Part-I', *South Asia Bulletin*, XIII, 1&2, 1993, pp. 93-121; Part-II, *ibid.*, XIV, 1, 1994, pp. 73-98. See, Chandra, Bipan, 'Communalism and Fundamentalism', *World Focus*, Feb.-March 1995, pp. 3-6, for a comparison between the two.

Here, Althusser's concept of overdetermination becomes helpful. Althusser insisted that no social entity was ever determined by one or a subset of other social entities, but rather each was the product of the interaction of all the others. However, at particular conjunctures, one entity becomes the overdetermining factor. Althusser, and Balibar, Etienne, *For Marx* (trans ) Ben Bewster, Allien Lamb the Penguin Press, Lon., 1967, pp. 87-128.

"... ideology can as little be divorced from factual knowledge as from rational justification and moral and other prescription." Seligar, Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
represent and understand communalism by means of selected quotes from some intellectual works have remained unsuccessful, if not invalid. This becomes more significant in the case of communalism in colonial India, when a colonial power was there to supervise communal politics and, at times, play a role as its interests in those contexts demanded. Similarly, communalism as an ideology cannot escape examination on standards of reason, as it is a reflection of the interaction of structures and processes which are founded on rational structures, i.e., economy and polity. And, on the standard of reason, therefore, it cannot escape a critique of its moral foundations and prescriptions. An attempt to read and understand communalism by examining the meaning of the terms or the knowledge which gave meaning to the term must, therefore, stand up to the rational and moral critique of communalism before attacking the rational and moral foundation of the historiography of communalism.

78 For a forceful criticism of this method of explaining a phenomenon like fascism, see, Allardyce, Gilbert, 'What Fascism is not: Thoughts on a Deflection of a Concept', American History Review, 84, 2, 1979, pp. 367-398.

79 For the role of British Policy in the entire process of the emergence and growth of communalism in Modern India, see, Chandra, Bipan, Communalism in Modern India, Vikash, Delhi, 1984, pp. 237-289. He says:

... one way of demolishing the critique of British policy regarding communalism and of ‘covering up’ the British role has been to present the critique in such an extreme or simplistic form that it appears... absurd... to suggest... that the British created the entire involvement of religion in politics... or that the entire communal antagonism or politics can be attributed to British policy... is to create a paper tiger... easily blown away with one puff.

... no responsible writer or leader has ever maintained that British rule was solely responsible for communalism.... What the anti-imperialist writers have maintained is that the colonial authorities followed a policy of divide and rule, encouraged and promoted communalism, accentuated communal conflicts and used communalism to perpetuate their rule; and that, consequently, the removal of colonialism was one of the necessary conditions... for the ‘solution’ of the communal problem.... to bring out British responsibility in this respect is to be accused of being a nationalist bigot (italics mine).

Ibid., pp. 238-239.

80 Emphasising the need to study ideology in the context of National Socialism. Lucy Davidowicz makes a significant point regarding American Historiography:

It is a commonplace observation that Anglo-American political traditions, compounded of liberalism, libertarianism, Utilitarianism, and Pragmatism, are at complete variance with the political ideologies of Communism, Fascism and Nazism.
Unlike fundamentalist movements, communalism, or the core of it, is not constituted by rejecting or criticising modernity or elements of modern politico-economic codes. This is one of the basic points of difference between these two phenomena and ideologies. Similarly, unlike in movements like National Socialism or Fascism, Communalism was not characterised by its ambivalent attitude towards modernity.

The debate about modernity, reason and colonial construction has brought an important question to the forefront - the experience of the colonised, and the knowledge which had come to dominate the paradigms and categories which described them. The question of agency has also become important, and recent writings have emphasised that the most significant intellectual endeavour should be to examine these paradigms, categories and knowledge, in order to give the colonised and the non-Western subject a voice and subjectivity, which had become entrapped due to the colonisation of knowledge itself.\(^\text{81}\) Beginning with Edward Said's Orientalism, the Middle East has been

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Ideological thinking, which entails a coherent and unitary view of human existence and of the universe (weltanschung), has been alien to American historians, not only because they have enshrined Pragmatism as an integral part of the American ethos, but even more because America's religious, racial and ethnic diversities and multiplicity have prevented the entrenchment of any one ideology in America's political life. Academic historians, who have experienced only the happy provincialism of American politics, often fail to perceive the dynamism that those Central and East European ideologies generated in the newly emergent Nation-states. American historians tend to approach the history of the Soviet Union as well as that of Nazi Germany with the conventional methods of nineteenth century Diplomatic, Political and Military history or of twentieth century socio-economic history, neglecting inquiry into political ideas and ideology. They have thereby, created a vacuum which has been penetrated mainly by the political scientists and philosophers.


Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a non-repressive and non-manipulative perspective. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power.

the subject of many studies on these lines. Bayly has tried to resurrect ‘agency’ by identifying communalism, as we have seen, with the religious fights of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Partha Chatterjee tries to accomplish this in two ways; first, by trying to read politics by dissecting its very structure for the colonised, and secondly, by conducting a virtual post-mortem on the ideological superstructure of that politics, i.e., the paradigms and categories of knowledge on which the colonised laid the foundations of their politics. While Partha Chatterjee attempts it on a generalised plane, Gyan Pandey, being a historian, tries to read its politics and bases it on a concrete historical plane, and in events. His attempt to read the community text of the Qasba, Mubarakpur, in order to give meaning to an event which the colonial authorities and Nationalist readings saw as a communal riot, is what he calls on as a counter-position to the colonial construction of the same event. This is a significant attempt at questioning the supposedly dominant paradigm of knowledge which, he argued, had quite an influence on the practice of history-writing, and on history-making processes in colonial India. Communalism is one such important phenomenon, he thinks, that is entrenched in such a relationship.

However, this is in effect a presentation of a normalised and sanitised version of the history of contestations in colonial India. The terms nationalism, communalism and colonialism are not just categories imposed by a rational knowledge but also signify the politics and contexts that went into making these categories political categories. The

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term modernity, which has of late tried to displace modernisation as a category of understanding communalism, takes the politics and contestations in the societal field out of the debate and in turn normalises the experience of the colonised, as it does not even talk about the ideational structures of colonialism but only of the structures of knowledge of the colonised. While the modernisation debate at least took cognisance of the colonial period in concrete historical terms and tried to look into the ideational structures of colonialism by studying its material and social bases, the recent debate on modernity completely avoids any such discussion. By valorising the 'subaltern', 'community', etc., it at the same time sanitises the communal phenomenon.

The problem of contextualisation becomes quite important in any analysis of communalism. Joya Chatterjee's treatment of Hindu Communalism of the 1920s and that of the forties collapses the contexts, as does that of Bayly. This fallacy leads writers to break-up the categories as well as politics of the nationalists, with the Hindu communalists, therefore, between the two ideological stands of Communalism and Nationalism. On this point, even the left historians share some of the ideas that the Imperialists and their successors, the Cambridge Historians have favoured. This has had a significant bearing on studies by writers like Vanaik.

The periodisation of Indian history into modernity and pre-modernity normalises the colonial context and, in this sense, these scholars uncritically accept colonial historiography, though ironically in the name of critical history. There is an uncritical and even a logical acceptance of the colonial assertion of modernising India. Transferring the

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83 It categorises all the earlier streams of historiography, i.e., Nationalist, Marxist and Communist, as one - liberalist in nature.

debate to the plane of modernity from that of modernisation, in fact, glosses over a large number of issues which have remained unanswered, i.e., economic exploitation of the colonies, the continuation of some of the institutional linkages; and in the age of neo-colonialism such arguments normalise colonialism. These arguments provide back door entry and post-facto justification of the colonial assertions which were hitherto contested.⁸⁵

Similarly, if communalism is merely a construct given meaning by the operation of modern rationality which both the colonialists and nationalists chose to accept as their politics, does it not mean that the fights between groups or religious armies carry the same meaning as that the Hindu villagers of Ambala or the Muslim villagers of Kohat gave to their actions in the 1920s and 1940s. Therefore, once stripped of the rationalist-liberal construct, if one accepts this contention, Gyan Pandey and Christopher Bayly are both leading to the same position; despite superficial differences, the normalisation and sanitisation of communalism is achieved.⁸⁶ Chatterjee does not accept the term communalism, nor does Pandey who uses “the term ‘communalism’ with or without inverted commas”, despite his “argument that it is loaded and obfuscating”, for the sake of “communication, and of convenient shorthand”.⁸⁷ Since empirical facts talk about

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⁸⁶ By resurrection of agency Bayly’s aims are quite clear - not only to excavate the prehistory of communalism and thereby, present it as a normal event in the long history of Indian society, but to show that there was no break at all. He, on the other hand, also wants to show that colonialism was not all that hegemonic; there were willing partners, i.e., Indian Christians. He claims: “... a proper revaluation of the British element in modern History might help us appreciate the limits of colonial hegemony and understand more precisely the locus of Indian agency and energy in the Indian Context”. ‘Returning the British to South Asian history: The limits of ‘colonial hegemony’, South Asia, XVII, 2, 1994, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Pandey, Gyanendra, op. cit., p. VIII.
communalism as it existed in the period we study - the modern period - a historian trained in using facts will generally not be happy to find the shift in the debate to the level of complete relativism in order to evade questions of the politics and ideology that determine these positions, or historical explanations.

Violence in the form of the communal riot itself is not the cause of communalism, but rather it is the product. However, violence is certainly a reflective index of the communalisation of society. Therefore, escalated violence and its aggressive insensitivity indicates the intensity and depth of ideological penetration that has taken place. This violence is, therefore, part of the ideological whole called communalism. For long, the State monopolised the use of violence to suppress any voice questioning its legitimacy. Any liberationist effort, therefore, also included challenging the state by waging counter violence. In this situation, any sanction or legitimisation of violence has to be rooted in the politics and the ideology that sanctions its use. A discourse on violence without taking cognisance of the ideological apparatus, is to naively ignore the entire process that went into making that violence. Communalism, being an ideology, legitimises, sanctions and creates occasions for violence. The Noakhali riot is a prime example of this argument, and at that juncture, Gandhi's ideological contestation of communalism, a prime example of prioritisation of the ideological fight which alone can fight such attempts at sanitisation or justification.

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88 Discussing the role of ideology in shaping the Nazi violence in Germany, Lucy Davidovicz says:

"In slighting the relationship between Nazi ideas and the bloody events that proceeded from them, the historian reduces his own capacity to explain Nazi Germany's past."

Davidowicz, Lucy S., op. cit., p. 31.
Bengal, the existence of which as a united political entity was greatly affected by the forces of communalism, has attracted a large number of historical studies which have tried to grapple with socio-economic and political developments of the Province that had directly or indirectly influenced the emergence and development of communalism.

The inevitability of Muslim separatism has informed quite a number of these studies, which also means that these studies are characterised by a tendency to show the linear development of Muslim separatism in that community. At the same time, it is also assumed that the socio-economic and politically advantageous position of the Hindus necessarily meant that the only recourse for Muslims was to articulate their political aspirations in the form of communalism and separatism. Studies on political groups and failure of movements, and the emphasis on personalities in these works, has put a premium on the treatment of communalism as an ideology, and its operation in the Province.

An implicit acceptance of the inevitability of Muslim separatism has forced historians to investigate the processes and changes in Muslim society in Bengal. Here the Partitions of 1905 and 1947 acted as significant postmarks, leaving a teleological stamp on the studies with the assertion that the Muslim society had been preparing itself and its politics for the Partition.
Sufia Ahmad accepts that the idea of separatism was a deliberate choice of the Muslim community due to their consciousness of “their inferiority in education and economic strength”.

The Muslims of Bengal... long pursued the policy of loyalty to the British power.... Younger members of this community became dissatisfied with so passive and unfruitful a role. So rumours of impending political change spread in Morley and Minto’s day, the Muslims of Bengal joined their forces with the Muslims of North India in approaching the Viceroy.

This situation arose, according to Sufia Ahmad, because the community was reluctant “to accept the western ideas and institutions of the conquerors”, and gradually lagged behind the other community, i.e., the Hindus, “who were gradually trying to make up for their past failure in the industrial and commercial sphere” and their educational backwardness. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, therefore, the community became very conscious of the disparity and the lag. This became reflected in the literature which, devoid of western sources of inspiration, gradually developed a reactive mind against the new subjects and modes that Bengali Hindus produced. This, for Sufia Ahmad, explains why there was a profusion of Islamic literature; “nearly all the histories are studies of Islamic history.” The aim of the authors was “to make their coreligionists aware of their religious, not national history.” Thus, the two political developments that marked this period were the ideological foundation


of a religious rather than national identity, and the growth of first, loyalist and then, separatist politics.

But why did this religious foundation not lead to movements like the Wahabi and Farazi taking root, and instead develop on separatist and communal lines. Secondly, the notion that the separatist idea was the "conscious choice of the community", homogenises the Muslim community, and its political orientation.

Germane to this understanding was the fact that owing to its not having taken up modernisation, the community came under the grip of religion and took a loyalist and separatist position. This has evoked historians to show that there was, though later in the twentieth century, a "quest for modernity which began in the first half of the nineteenth century amongst the Bengali Hindus due to the western impact".

However, Jayanti Maitra argues that there was a neo-modern Muslim section, but it failed to provide leadership at the crucial juncture:

In the decades following the revolt of 1857, the leadership in the Muslim society in the most general terms came to be constituted of the 'Muslim westernising bourgeoisie'. It had been gradually building up its distinctive position... it was sharply marked off from the rest of the Indian bourgeoisie... Neither was it in a position to give correct leadership to the lower classes and other non-westernisers who most vividly preserved and warmly cherished the ideas of Islamic tradition.

She further argues by quoting Rajat Ray who says that "the economic backwardness of the generality of the Bengali Muslims and their subordination to the

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96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., p. 98.


99 Maitra, Jayanti, Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1855-1906, K. P. Bagchi, Cal., p. 122.
rich and influential Urdu speaking elite also hindered the possibility of any co-operation between the former and the Bengali Hindus. 100

In course of time, this led to the evolution of a separatist political movement. The responsibility, according to her, was also shared by the prominent leaders of the Hindu community, because even "the most eminent Hindu political leaders on their part, failed to understand the real feelings and grievances of the Muslim community and to appreciate the motives which guided their policy". 101 And here, the zeal of the Hindus "for democracy and nationalism", comes in for criticism because, as Maitra argues (along with R. C. Mazumdar), this zeal also made them forget the large section of people who refused to "accept these ideals" for "very good reasons". 102 The favouring of the Muslim community by the British soon began to be resisted by the Hindus.

These studies, which emphasise the separatist ideas gradually emerging and gaining shape, take a very static view of Muslim society and, in a way, homogenise the responses of the society. Although Maitra tries to break this homogeneity by studying the response of the leadership, she fails to provide any clue about the contestation within Muslim and Hindu society regarding these ideas.

While the Partitions were the obvious teleology that informed these studies, there was a group of writers for whom Indian Nationalism was primarily a reflection of the interests of sections of the Hindu community, articulated through the Indian National Congress. In the context of Bengal, the category of Bhadralok - a social one demarcating


101 Ibid., p. 85.

respectability - was brought out of its Weberian frame of reference and loaded with political connotations to discuss developments in the Province.

Some writers emphasised that Muslim separatism was a product, among other things, of the lag amongst the Muslims in economic, social and educational fields. They argued that it was self-interests that motivated the Bhadralok to resist the development of the Muslim community as such and its leaders in particular. This pushed the latter towards communalism, while the former became more and more bitter against the colonial authority for favouring the Muslim community. In fact, the argument leads them to conclude that the Bhadralok, feeling their political impotency, were rapidly turning towards Hindu communalism.

In 1960, Broomfield wrote on the 'elite conflict' in Bengal:

For the Hindu bhadralok, forced to be helpless witness to the agonising death of thousand upon thousands of their fellow-countrymen, the break down was an indictment on the alien Government and its Muslim associates who, in their view, had reduced the Hindus to political impotence. 103

Therefore, in this argument, the Bhadralok was angry with both the colonial authorities and the Muslims. “Bitterly resentful of the communal injuries they had suffered and fearful of what the future would bring,” wrote Broomfield, “the Hindu bhadralok distrusted the Muslim’s every word and action”. 104

The self-interest which moved the Bhadralok of Anil Seal’s analysis to turn into competitors of the Raj, in Broomfield’s study led to a distrust of the Muslims when the former realised that they had become politically impotent. Ideology has no place in these studies. Nationalism was just an articulation of individual or group frustration. The


emphasis on their selfish interests, and nationalism being just an articulation of these interests through group politics, renders these studies incapable of explaining why people were moved by a particular ideology, be it nationalism or communalism. Joya Chatterjee also attempts to include communalism in this same theoretical premise, i.e., the Bhadralok feeling threatened by the attacks on their self-interest, and hence, turning communal. Even a communal riot in a town was, for her, only the reflection of this Bhadralok’s feeling of impotency. She writes,

In the Hindu majority districts in particular, bhadralok Hindus had hoped to compensate for their loss of provincial power with an increased voice in local affairs. But this had proved impossible and instead, they found themselves losing ground to Muslims on all fronts.... The vehemence of bhadralok resistance to the introduction of Korbani for instance, was not so much a measure of religious outrage - it was rather a measure of their increasing political impotence.105 (italics mine)

The works of Sugata Bose, Suranjan Das and Partha Chatterjee are significant in that they view communalism in a wider frame, and tend to accept it as a coherent societal perspective which could dictate political and social action of a section of population at a particular historical juncture.

Sugata Bose has separated Bengal into three areas according to the typology of their distinctive agrarian and social structures, and the characteristics of politics in these areas. He argues that enmeshing of agrarian Bengal with the world market gradually led to the unmaking of that society; integration with the world market in its period of crisis also adversely affected the rural society and its economy. It had the effect of sapping the symbiosis that existed in rural society.106 This was particularly so in the 30s and 40s,

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106 He writes:

Faced with the problem of ensuing subsistence from a diminishing holding the Bengal peasant, especially in the east, laid himself open to the vagaries of the world market upon which he had little control. The complex of credit relations which critically affected the liquidity of the internal economy, transmitted external influences on to the internal market.

when the slump in the world market also resulted in a credit squeeze in the rural economy and this tended to break the symbiotic relations between the creditor and peasants. He locates the origin of the Kishorganj riot and, to an extent, the Noakhali-Tippera riot, in this break-up of the symbiosis.

He intervenes in the debate over pre-existing peasant communal consciousness. He shows how the theme of 'peasant consciousness' was over played, and says that "the basic right to right in land in Bengal and, for that matter, in most part of India was essentially an individual right. The perception of individual interests as collective interest was not easy to achieve". However he sees religion as the dominant element shaping the consciousness of the Muslim peasantry because it was readily available "as a powerful legitimising ideology when a change in the balance of class power brought the rejection of the old order within the realm of possibility." Thus in the final analysis it is religion and not communal consciousness which is crucial for understanding "the choice of certain identities" in forging "the community of resistance". Refusing communalism the status of an ideology, what Bose has tried to show is close to what Partha Chatterjee tried - questioning the category of communalism itself. Bose write:

Since the later 19th century the language of communalism has tended to reserve the term 'community' to refer to social affiliations determined by birth, among which religion and caste occupied a privileged place. The dominant discourse of Indian nationalism, accepting the methodology while rejecting the substance of colonial knowledge, increasingly sought to privilege the all encompassing nation over particularist ties sought to privilege.

However his resolution of this problem with the hegemony of the notion ‘nation’ is different from Chatterjee and the Pandey. He tries to locate this difference in the realm of resistance and free choice of the ‘subordinate social groups, i.e., peasants and labourers, in taking recourse to ‘communitarianism’ which is different from ‘communal conflict’.

Suranjan Das, tries to study the contours of communal violence in the province from 1906 to 1947 and examines the career and the nature of transformation of communal violence during this phase. He sees communalism through the prism of communal riots. Communal riots, says Suranjan Das, shape the community’s perception of boundaries given to it by symbols. Similarly, he tries to show how riots transformed communal consciousness. Das eschews the extremes of portraying the communal riot as class struggle and suggesting that violence was inherent in the latent separateness of the Muslim community which informed the history writings till recently. However, a linear development informs his treatment, i.e., a gradual convergence of ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ communalism / riots, and increasing political overtones of the communal riots, which finally resulted in separation and Partition.

IV

THE PRESENT WORK

The present work tries to locate manifestations of communal ideology. The term communalism is not in question but the phenomenon and the ideology that sustains this


phenomenon are. The activities of the Muslim League, the Communist Party and the Hindu Mahasabha articulated different facets of the politics which either accepted or negated the ideological import of communalism in Bengal in the period between the famine and the Noakhali riot.

The first chapter discusses the politics and the discourse that began to take shape in the wake of the famine in the province. The chapter attempts to look at the ideological ambience that created the space for mobilisation by the three political parties, viz., the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Communist Party of India. I have not made an attempt to deal with the causes and consequence of the famine.

The second chapter looks into the issues that went into the mobilisation drive of the two parties, i.e., the Hindu Mahasabha and the Communist Party during 1943-45; the mobilisation politics of the Muslim League has been dealt with in Chapter I.

The third chapter seeks to enquire into the politics of communalism in the province from the time the political process began with the release of the Congress leaders to the Direct Action Day on which Calcutta witnessed the killings in an unprecedented manner.

The Noakhali riots and the entire gamut of questions related to it forms the fourth chapter. It seeks to locate not the just causes of the riots but the causes of the different nature of the violence that accompanied them in Noakhali and Tippera.

Gandhi's visit to Noakhali and his attempt to fight the communal ideology constitutes the fifth chapter. It also tries to look into the relationship that developed between Gandhi and Suhrawardy and its political and ideological context and implications.