Nehru’s Co-ordinates of Nationalist Imagination

In this chapter we will be looking at Nehru’s idea of nationalism. Since Nehru’s discourse runs through coordinates of concepts, we would make an attempt to see them as such, by highlighting one aspect in the light of another and find out how Nehru’s ideas run through them and each aspect gets fused into the other. Here, we would first take up how Nehru looks at the relationship between tradition and science vis-à-vis each other and through them what sense of a cultural and national identity emerges in his conception. We would then focus on the larger context within each of the specific conceptual ideas of these three coordinates which work under Nehru’s overall attitude towards the relationship between colonialism, nationalism and modernity. This will help us to create a comprehensible picture of Nehru’s approach towards the issues at hand. Finally, we would look at how Nehru, in his most important work, *The Discovery of India*, imagines the nation or country he seeks to discover for himself, in order to place his own ideas in a shape of this very imagination, where historical narrative is fused with a more subjective element of an individualistic approach.

*Tradition, Science, Identity:*

The Mexican poet-critic Octavio Paz described Nehru as one who “belonged to a double anti-tradition”. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge, Nehru developed close links with European culture and, as Paz points out, “drew inspiration from the rebellious and heterodox thought of the West”. On the

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2 Ibid. p.15-16
other hand, Nehru's other lineage is traced by Paz back to his ancestors who "had frequented the Mogul court and had absorbed Persian and Arabic heritage", and to his family tradition from which "he had a vein of heterodoxy vis-à-vis Hindu traditionalism". Nehru has written in his autobiography how he was "accused by some leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha" of his "ignorance of Hindu sentiments" because of his "defective education and general background of 'Persian' culture". To this accusation Nehru had to say: "What culture I possess, or whether I possess any at all, is a little difficult for me to say". Nehru here highlights a kind of identity that Zymut Bauman has called: "nomads" of modernity.

In his own admission, though India was in Nehru's "blood", he "approached her like an alien critic", and "(t)o some extent .. came to her via the West". This unique predicament of a cultural identity, which is part insider and part outsider, undergoes a partial sense of apology. It is also inflicted upon them by so-called "culturally rooted" people, who force them, in the words of Bauman, "to prove the legality of their presence". The demand for such legality is cultural in nature, and throws open a debate about the relationship between culture, history and ethics. Colonialism further intervenes this debate in a complicated manner. We shall look into this debate in another chapter.

Nehru has a diachronous view of India's cultural past(s) and refuses to place tradition into any particular traditionalist framework. He understands

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3 Ibid. p. 15-16
4 Nehru, Jawaharlal, An autobiography, OUP, 1980, p. 169
5 Ibid. p. 169
7 Nehru, Jawaharlal, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p. 50 (italics mine)
Hinduism, for example, only in the "widest sense of Indian culture". This is not trying to equate religion into any nationalist framework. In fact, Nehru is doing the very opposite. Hinduism and India are not co-terminus for Nehru. The relationship between the two is mediated by a history that includes the intervention of other faiths, viz., Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. All these religions came to acquire a distinctive identity within India's geo-cultural boundary and in the process brought in changes within Hinduism itself. So Nehru looks at the question of tradition in history as one where change is definitive. This change comes from the historical examples of "synthesis" which Nehru traces right back to the meeting between the Aryans and the Dravidians, and later between the settlers and the Iranians, Greeks, Parthians, Bactrians, Scythians, Huns, Turks (before Islam), early Christians, Jews (and) Zoroastrians. He grants this phenomenon of synthesis to the "astonishing inclusive capacity of Hinduism".

To Nehru, Hinduism thus represents a culture more than a religion, and in this, he is one of the sole Indian nationalists of the era to have made this distinction with historical reasons. Thus Nehru's idea of tradition is also contextual: every tradition has its own "spirit" of historical evolution. "(T)here is a special heritage for us in India" he writes in *The Discovery*, yet "not an exclusive one, for none is exclusive and all are common to the race of man". Here Nehru does hint at a universality of thought and culture, though premised upon a heterogeneity of cultures. Octavio Paz has noted how, in the context of British colonialism in India, Nehru "saw the opposition between

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9 Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery*, OUP, 1964, p. 74
10 Ibid. p. 74
11 Ibid. p. 59
East and West as the clash between two historical realities"^{12}. To Paz, "for Nehru, the clash between different cultures was rather fictitious; the real thing was the historical opposition"^{13}. So we find yet another distinction made by Nehru: between culture and history. The debate between culture, history and ethics surfaces again, this time from Nehru's standpoint. We shall, as pointed above, deal with this issue later.

Nehru raises the question of identity that is modern, but one that does not come from the sole premises of Enlightenment rationality. It comes from a Romantic sense of individuality where a person belongs both inside and outside of one's culture. It comes from a lived experience of cultural heterogeneity, which is not simply an issue about critical engagement with one's tradition, which is also part of Romanticism, but from recognition of a more diverse cultural history of one's identity. It is automatically individualistic in nature.

Paz goes further to conclude: "Contrary to the anthropologists and the historians who postulate the multiplicity of cultures, Nehru affirmed the unity of thought and the universality of science, art and technology. In this universality, he saw the answer to the antagonism of the historical worlds"^{14}.

Here one cannot entirely agree with Paz. As we have seen, Nehru did have a conception of cultural heterogeneity. The idea of universality works at two levels in Nehru: One, the historical borrowings between cultures. Two, the universality of reason. Nehru takes the cultural capacity for synthesis as a

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^{13} Ibid. p.14

^{14} Ibid. p.14
normative. This cultural capacity within traditions, as mentioned before, also has a contextual basis in Nehru. With regard to borrowing, Nehru however, cautions:

"It should be equally obvious that there can be no cultural or spiritual growth based on imitation. Such imitation can only be confined to a small number which cuts itself off from the masses and the springs of national life. True culture derives its inspiration from every corner of the world but is home-grown and has to be based on the wide mass of people ... The day of a narrow culture confined to a small fastidious group is past."^{15}

Here Nehru is trying to merge the idea of cultural synthesis with the idea of democracy. What is imitation to Nehru is a cultural borrowing which is elitist in nature. There is of course the question of "reason". The history of cultural synthesis that Nehru treats as a normative, finds reason for the taking, in terms of a universal tool of enquiry. In the history of culture, reason is the new normative for Nehru. If democracy is the new political ideal of any culture, it is through the critical faculty of reason that Nehru wants to address the questions before that ideal. In this context, the Enlightenment debate between tradition and reason surfaces in Nehru:

"As knowledge advances, the domain of religion, in the narrow sense of the word, shrinks. The more we understand life and nature, the less we look for supernatural causes."^{16} So it is "with the temper and approach of science,

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^{15} Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery*, OUP, 1964, p. 564 (italics mine)  
^{16} Ibid. p. 514
allied to philosophy, and with reverence for all that lies beyond, that we must face life.”

Lets now follow the examples Chatterjee offers, where Nehru addresses the Orientalist thematic, and the conclusions Chatterjee draws from them. First, the passage which shows how Nehru “offers a direct rebuttal of the essentialist dichotomy between Eastern and Western cultures”:

“Ancient Greece is supposed to be the fountainhead of European civilization, and much has been written about the fundamental difference between the Orient and the Occident. I do not understand this; a great deal of it seems to be vague and unscientific without much basis in fact. Till recently many European thinkers imagined that everything that was worth while had its origin in Greece or Rome ... Even when some knowledge of what peoples in Asia had done in the past soaked into the European mind, it was not willingly accepted.”

Chatterjee then goes to show how Nehru grasps the difference between the East and the West in terms of “industrialization and lack of industrialization.”

“I do not understand the use of the words Orient and Occident, except in the sense that Europe and America are highly industrialized and Asia is backward in this respect. This industrialization is something new in the world's history...
There is no organic connection between Hellenic civilization and modern European and American civilization\textsuperscript{21}.

Chatterjee draws from Nehru's account how Nehru finds "the spirit and outlook of ancient Greece" to be "much closer to those of ancient India and China" than the modern European nations\textsuperscript{22}.

He concludes from Nehru's recounting of the past how, "nationalist thought has come to grips with the Orientalist thematic; ... is now able to criticize it ... has got rid of those cultural essentialisms that had confined it since birth and, at last, it is able to look at the histories of the nation and the world in their true specificities"\textsuperscript{23}.

But a little later, Chatterjee discovers how, in terms of drawing India's own cultural thematic, "the distinctions between the scientific and the unscientific, the rational and the irrational, the practical and the metaphysical" in Nehru, "are exactly those which, in their most general terms, had come to dominate post-Enlightenment rationalist, and more specifically positivist, thought in Europe"\textsuperscript{24}. The below passage from \textit{The Discovery} is where Chatterjee draws our attention to:

"India, as well as China, must learn from the West, for the modern West has much to teach, and the spirit of the age is represented by the West. But the West is also obviously in need of learning much, and its advances in technology will bring it little comfort if it does not learn some of the deeper

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. p. 134
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. p. 134
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. p. 134
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. p. 138-139
lessons of life, which have absorbed the minds of thinkers in all ages and in all countries.”

Chatterjee understands Nehru to be saying here that “we must learn the material skills from the West without losing our spiritual heritage.”

But is Nehru really saying this? Nehru isn't making any "spiritual" versus "material" distinction in an essentialist sense at all. Nehru holds no serious break between Indian cultural traditions and the modern, scientific spirit. As he says:

"(t)he essential ideals of Indian culture are broad-based and can be adopted to almost any environment. The bitter conflict between science and religion which shook up Europe in the nineteenth century would have no reality in India, nor would change based on the applications of science bring any conflict with those ideals ... It is probable that in this process many vital changes may be introduced in the old outlook, but they will not be superimposed from outside and will seem to grow naturally from the cultural background of the people.”

Nehru sees no quarrel between science and Indian culture. He feels that the scientific way of thinking would “naturally” emerge from within Indian culture. He doesn't see science as culturally alien. Chatterjee has mentioned how “Nehru could even assert...that ancient Indian thought was much closer to the

25 Ibid. p. 138
26 Nehru Jawaharlal, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p. 518 (italics mine)
spirit of the scientific attitude than the overall cultural values of the modern West"\textsuperscript{27}. In this context he quotes Nehru from \textit{The Discovery}:

"Science has dominated the Western world and everyone there pays tribute to it, and yet the West is still far from having developed the real temper of science. It has still to bring the spirit and the flesh into creative harmony...the essential basis of Indian thought for ages past, though not its later manifestations, fits in with the scientific temper and approach, as well as with internationalism. It is based on a fearless search for truth, on the solidarity of man, even on the divinity of everything living, and on the free and co-operative development of the individual and the species, ever to greater freedom and higher stages of human growth"\textsuperscript{28}.

The point is, the spiritual-material dichotomy as created by post-Enlightenment rationalist thought divides the two spheres into antagonistic zones within a culture, and within the Orientalist thematic, it divides the spheres ethnically.

Nehru, as Chatterjee has shown, comes to terms with the Orientalist thematic. As pointed above, Nehru doesn't find a quarrel happening between science and religion in Indian culture like it did in the West. Nehru never pitted science and traditionalism in the language of a spiritual-material dichotomy. In fact, for Nehru, 'scientific temper' means "a way of life, a process of thinking, a method of acting and associating with our fellowmen ... It is the temper of a free man"\textsuperscript{29}. It is a \textit{democratic} ideal to which Nehru relates the scientific

\textsuperscript{27} Chatterjee, Partha, \textit{Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?}, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p. 139
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. p. 139
\textsuperscript{29} Nehru, Jawaharlal, \textit{The Discovery}, OUP, 1964, p. 512
temper, the way he related the democratic idea with the issue of a genuine cultural synthesis, as was shown above. It is strange how in his quote on Nehru above, Chatterjee ignores how Nehru links the idea of the 'scientific temper' with such a spiritual notion as "the divinity of everything living". Nehru, hence, fuses the spiritual and the scientific. He finds the West wanting on the ethical and moral side of this critical temper, which he equates with the "solidarity of man", "free and co-operative development ..." and "greater freedom".

In The Discovery, Nehru in fact clearly distinguishes between what he means by 'science' and the 'scientific temper':

"Science deals with the domain of positive knowledge but the temper which it should produce goes beyond that domain. The ultimate purposes of man may be said to be to gain knowledge, to realize truth, to appreciate goodness and beauty. The scientific method of objective enquiry is not applicable to all these, and much that is vital in life seems to lie beyond its scope – the sensitiveness of art and poetry, the emotion that beauty produces, the inner recognition of goodness"\(^{30}\).

We have pointed out how Nehru distinguishes between religion and culture, where he treats religion as a dogmatic super structure and culture as a normative between various religious traditions. Whenever he links the scientific temper to the aesthetic and spiritual realm, it is the sense of this cultural normative that he has in mind. Whenever he pits science against tradition, he has a stricter understanding of tradition in mind.

\(^{30}\) Ibid. p. 512-13
Like he says here in the context of the conflict between science and religion in India in the modern age:

"Conflict, however, there will be, with much of the superstructure that has grown up round those basic ideals and which exist and stifles us today. That superstructure will inevitably have to go, because much of it is bad in itself and contrary to the spirit of the age. Those who seek to retain it do an ill service to the basic ideals of Indian culture"\(^{31}\).

Nehru at times specifically points out against what he prefers science:

"India must lessen her religiosity and turn to science. She must get rid of the exclusiveness in thought and social habit which has made life a prison for her, stunning her spirit and preventing growth. The idea of ceremonial purity has erected barriers against social intercourse and narrowed the sphere of social action. The day-to-day religion of the orthodox Hindu is more concerned with what to eat and what not to eat, who to eat with and from whom to keep away, than with spiritual values. The rules and regulations of the kitchen dominate his social life"\(^{32}\).

Though, as I have shown, there is a constant "tension" in Nehru between an optimistic attitude towards science and a more cautious regard for cultural traditions, it is of course true that Nehru was generally for a pro-scientific progress about most things. And the post-Enlightenment bias in Nehru, as pointed by Chatterjee, seems true in a general sense. Nehru was always vehemently opposed to what he called "that narrowing religious outlook ..."

\(^{31}\) Ibid. p. 518
\(^{32}\) Ibid. p. 520
that obsession with the supernatural and metaphysical speculations, that loosening of the mind's discipline in religious ceremonial and mystical emotionalism". On the other hand, even when "realizing ... (the) limitations of reason and scientific method, we have still to hold on to them with all our strength, for without that firm basis and background we can have no grip on any kind of truth or reality".

By this, Nehru seems to be indeed borrowing the dichotomy in post-Enlightenment knowledge, creating a kind of scientific essentialism about knowledge in general terms. But reason, in Nehru, as I have tried to show, is not a normative in itself, but connected to two ideals: the ideal of cultural synthesis and the ideal of democracy. What we would examine later is this relationship between reason and the two ideals. It is strange again that Chatterjee never brings up these two issues in his analysis of Nehru's "nationalist" thought at all.

Chatterjee however points out how Nehru escapes the essentialist conception of Orientalism only to fall back upon a "conjunctural" conception of historical difference. Chatterjee concludes how Nehru looks at the difference between the West and India as a difference in the process of industrialization on the economic side, and as having lost its inner vigour and vitality, on the cultural side. So the Orientalist thematic, according to Chatterjee, comes back in terms of the way Nehru looks at India's history from an insider's point of view. But for a "conjunctural" difference to become Orientalist, the justificatory discourse of Orientalism and its substantive values have to be appropriated in

33 Ibid. p. 519-20
34 Ibid. p. 512
the context of anti-colonial struggle, in the way Nehru looks at India's culture and its economic options of renewal. It needs to be asked then, how Nehru's discourse is able to justify an ideological critique of colonialism through the same premises. Doesn't the critique of an essentialist Oriental discourse itself intervene the conjunctural dichotomy in a political and ethical sense?

It is also true that though Nehru does believe that "(n)ational progress can ... neither lie in a repetition of the past nor in its denial", he does vehemently keep repeating in The Discovery that "there is no going back to the past". Espousing a linear conception of historical progress, which is again post-Enlightenment thought, Nehru seems quite clear that: "There is only one-way traffic in time". But such assertions always end up being ambivalent in Nehru's overall discourse. Time always flows in two directions in Nehru.

In one of his famous lectures, Nehru spoke about the historical moment he was in, being one of "tumult" and "confusion", where "we stand facing both ways, forward toward the future and backwards towards the past, being pulled in two directions". Nehru's The Discovery is all about this anxiety and desire to recover his past. Nehru understood that without being able to recover the "past" for himself, he couldn't talk about the "present". The past haunts Nehru till the end of the book. In the very beginning Nehru admits:

35 Ibid. p. 517
36 Ibid. p. 520
"The burden of the past, the burden of both good and ill, is over-powering, and sometimes suffocating, more especially for those of us who belong to a very ancient civilization."\(^{38}\)

It should be asked, what exactly was Nehru so anxious to recover from the past, in a personal as well as general sense? From his account it appears that Nehru, conscious of his partly outsider status with regard to his culture, and equally conscious of his ties with that culture, sought an "entry" into his country's history. We can link two fundamental responses in Nehru with regard to this quest. As he says, "I was obsessed with the thought of India" (an emotional response); and a little later, "I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity" (a critical response)\(^{39}\). The question which triggers off *The Discovery* is what he asks among other ones, on India: "How does she fit into the modern world?"\(^{40}\) It is also asking the question: How do I as a modern subject, fit into India?

It is thus in the form of a modern engagement that Nehru undertakes this endeavour. We have seen how Nehru has defended his double anti-traditional status. He refused to belong to any particular tradition and in the same vein argued for an anti-traditional modernity in India. One can say that he saw India in the same image as he saw himself, a product of cultural borrowings and a necessity to come out of the rigid shackles of the past. It's not that he identified himself or India's true image, with that past entirely. The past had to be as much created as he made himself. It was a matter of choice, a radical choice at that, where certain principles were at stake. The issue was not

\(^{38}\) Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery*, OUP, 1964, p. 36  
\(^{39}\) Ibid. p. 49  
\(^{40}\) Ibid. p. 49
merely cultural; it was ethical. We will analyze this notion of ethics later. To me, at the level of identity, the question which Nehru poses in this discourse, is: In what ways is it "possible" for a double anti-traditionalist identity - one who both belongs to his culture and also partly an "alien" - to critically engage himself with his culture? It is through his own sense of identity, as part insider and part outsider, that Nehru enters the story of his country's history (and politics). As a modern subject, Nehru finds himself culturally displaced. He belongs to many cultures and none. Like many moderns, he has to re-invent his identity. To re-invent his identity he has to first re-invent a past he can "belong" to. This desire of belonging, though outwardly Romantic in nature, has a "subjectivist" turn in Nehru, as we shall now see.

The subjectivist endeavour, as Charles Taylor explains, unlike the "original Romantic yearning" for a return to "nature and unadorned feeling", turns "to a retrieval of experience or interiority". It touches "the basic modes of narrativity of disengaged reason, and of Romanticism". It combines "a view of history as progress, in which the development of reason and science leads to ever-greater instrumental control and hence well-being", and the view which "presents history as a decline, but (it) also has an optimistic variant: of history as growth ... moving in the end towards a reconciliation of reason and feeling". According to Taylor, this subjectivist stance or, what he calls "the inward turn", looks at the predicament of the historical moment in this manner:

42 Ibid. p. 461
43 Ibid. p. 465
44 Ibid. p. 461
"The present age is indeed spiritually indignant. We in our time need to recover the past in order to attain fullness. But this is not so much because history has meant decline, as because the fullness of meaning isn't available with the resources of a single age. And what is more ... we can recapture the past, or rather, make the great moments and achievements of other times come alive in ours."

We can compare this elucidation of Taylor with two citations from Nehru, where his subjectivist stance, visible throughout the tension-ridden pages of The Discovery, is amply clear. Here he says:

"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.

We can never forget the ideals that have moved our race, the dreams of the Indian people through the ages, the wisdom of the ancients ... the daring of their thought, their splendid achievements in literature, art and culture, their love of truth and beauty and freedom ... their toleration of other ways than theirs, their capacity to absorb other peoples and their cultural accomplishments, to synthesize them and develop a varied and mixed culture ... We will never forget them or cease to take pride in that noble heritage of ours. If India forgets them she will no longer remain India and much that has made her our joy and pride will cease to be.

\[45\] Ibid. p. 465
It is not this 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, the excrescences and abortions that have twisted and petrified her spirit ... We have to ... remember afresh the core of that ancient wisdom and adapt it to our present circumstances. And further:

“There is something lacking in all this progress, which can neither produce harmony between nations nor within the spirit of man. Perhaps more synthesis and a little humility towards the wisdom of the past, which, after all, is the accumulated experience of the human race, would help us to gain a new perspective and greater harmony. That is especially needed by those peoples who live a fevered life in the present only and have almost forgotten the past.”

So for Nehru, as much as it is necessary to capture the spirit of the age, it is also important to capture the spirit of other ages. In this sense, Nehru imagined the coming into being of “integrated personalities.”

Being a heterodoxical identity, Nehru exemplifies a radical sense of individualism in the way he recreates a personalized narrative (both subjective and objective) of his links with his country's culture and the modern culture of the West. He has a “thick” idea of individualism where the individual should be able to critically make his way through the various conflicts and choices across cultures. It is a demanding sense of individualism. The individual, like Nehru, having severed his ties with lot many value-systems of his or her tradition, is now faced with a vast body of cultural choices and a

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46 Nehru, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p. 509
47 Ibid. p. 519
48 Ibid. p. 519
multiple identity. According to him, we have to "remain true Indians and
Asiatics, and become at the same time good internationalists and world
citizens". The key thing here is the distinction between "remain" and
"become". The conception is that we remain unique to our cultural identity,
and at the same time strive to become the link for solidarities in the world of
other human beings. So Nehru argues for a double-responsibility for the
heterodoxical and democratic identity. Also a double normative: the cultural
self should be synthetic enough to remain "Indian" and democratic enough to
become a "good internationalist". In a way, it looks like an objective variation
of a subjective choice, which in Nehru, springs from a synthetic idea of a
history of the cultural self and enlarges into a synthetic idea of co-operation
and comradeship. There is of course the idea of the rational self, which is able
to both (dis)engage critically and able to make radical choices. But this critical
element of the self is required to reinforce its ties with the various "other"
peoples of the world. The difference which Nehru draws between what we
should "remain" and what we should "become" is of course alive to the
question of remaining different even as we strive for a unity. It does not seek
the annulment of individuality, which is faced with cultural reciprocity. For
Nehru, the culturally distinct individual is also the integrated personality who
has made the ideas of the world his own. Finally, this image of the individual
self-identity that Nehru seems to draw is located within the debate between
culture, history and ethics, which we would look into later.

**Colonialism, Nationalism and Modernity:**

It is interesting to note that when Nehru first touches upon the issue of
nationalism in *The Discovery*, he neither equates it with any definition of *India*
as a "nation", nor treats the idea of nationalism as an end in itself, even within the context of the anti-colonial movement:

“For any subject country national freedom must be the first and dominant urge; for India, with her intense sense of individuality and a past heritage, it was doubly so”⁴⁹.

It is clear that Nehru treats “national freedom” in the context of India being a “subject country”, but India is not merely a subject country: it is a place with an “intense sense of individuality”, and has a “past heritage”. It seems, for Nehru, national freedom means a specific political cause in a particular historical context, but what makes national freedom a justified cause is linked to the question of a country’s “individuality” which lies outside the specific context of not only colonialism but nationalism as well, partly resting upon the unique history of her heritage, and partly as of course, to the modern idea of “individuality”, which Nehru treats as a value linked to issues of democracy and culture as we have seen. The problems of a country’s individuality are only partially linked to the issue of anti-colonial nationalism for Nehru, as much as the issues of culture. These issues are linked to an amorphous construct of “India”, which we shall examine later. But in specific terms these are some of the indicators in Nehru’s ideas:

“The nationalist ideal is deep and strong; it is not a thing of the past with no future significance. But other ideals, more based on the ineluctable facts of today, have arisen, the international ideal and the proletarian ideal, and there

⁴⁹ Nehru, Jawaharlal, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p. 52
must be some kind of fusion between these various ideals if were to have a world equilibrium and a lessening of conflict.

The abiding appeal of nationalism to the spirit of man has to be recognized and provided for, but its sway limited to a narrow sphere\textsuperscript{50}.

So until nationalism, for Nehru, doesn't lead to the "fusion" between "various ideals", it will always remain in the "narrow sphere", which Nehru identifies with a static and rigid traditionalism. Nehru wonders in The Discovery:

"(E)ven to-day it is strange how we suddenly become overwhelmed by tradition, and the critical faculties of even intelligent men cease to function. This may be partly due to the nationalism that consumes us in our present subject state. Only when we are politically and economically free will the mind function normally and critically\textsuperscript{51}.

So nationalism is a temporary hindrance to the mind functioning "normally" and "critically". It is of course an inevitable and partly necessary development in the present circumstances. Yet we should always try to look beyond it. The desire for the "normal" and the "critical" again seems to throw Nehru into the post-Enlightenment category of thinking. But one must notice here that Nehru regards the present context as overwhelmingly biased towards a rigid traditionalist imagination. Nehru seeks to cut through this discourse with the elements of reason. One finds Nehru arguing for a more balanced acceptance of the importance of reason in a society he considers rigidly traditionalist, than arguing for an absolute dominance of reason. In fact, if this had not been

\textsuperscript{50} ibid. p. 53
\textsuperscript{51} ibid. p. 103
Nehru's stance, the tension within his strong pleas for scientific thinking and his subjectivist forays into India's cultural history, wouldn't have appeared constantly throughout his writings. We can see it in his particular attitude towards nationalism itself.

"Nationalism" Nehru defines, "is essentially a group memory about past achievements, traditions, and experiences."\(^{52}\) He contends that "one of the remarkable developments of the present age has been the rediscovery of the past and the nation."\(^{53}\)

Again on the other hand, Nehru has this to say:

"(N)ationalism by itself seemed to me definitely a narrow and insufficient creed. Political freedom, independence, were no doubt essential, but they were steps only in the right direction; without social freedom and the socialistic structure of society and the state, neither the country nor the individual could develop."\(^{54}\)

Nehru was primarily anxious of how others hide vested interest under cover of communalism or even nationalism, something of the nature of religious revivalism. He was categorical about this: "You may well have described Hindu communalism as Hindu nationalism and Muslim communalism as Muslim nationalism and you would have been correct."\(^{55}\)

\(^{52}\) Ibid. p. 515  
\(^{53}\) Ibid. p. 515  
About the rise of the Hindu communities like the Marathas and the Rajputs against the last phase of Mughal rule in India, which Nehru calls nationalistic, he has this to say:

"That combination of religion and nationalism gained strength and cohesiveness from both elements, and yet its ultimate weakness and insufficiency were also derived from that mixture. For it could only be an exclusive and partial nationalism, not including the many elements in India that lay outside that religious sphere. Hindu nationalism was a natural growth from the soil of India, but inevitably it comes in the way of the larger nationalism which rises above differences of cast and creed"\textsuperscript{56}.

Nehru identifies the age-old historical representation of India in "synthesis". We will have occasion to analyze this issue later. Let's now trace Nehru's ideas on what he identifies as colonialism.

Just as Nehru had found instances of nationalism in India's ancient and medieval periods, it was the same with colonialism. Interestingly, the first issue he takes up with regard to the colonial issue is the writing of history:

"History is almost always written by the victors and conquerors and gives their viewpoint; or, at any rate, the victors' version is given prominence and holds the field. Very probably, all the early records we have of the Aryans in India, their epics and traditions, glorify the Aryans and are unfair to the people of the country whom they subdued. No individual can wholly rid himself of his racial outlook and cultural limitations, and when there is conflict between races and countries even an attempt at impartiality is considered a betrayal of one's

\textsuperscript{56} Nehru, Jawaharlal, \textit{The Discovery}, OUP, 1964, p. 272
people ... The overpowering need of the moment is to justify one's own actions and condemn and blacken those of the enemy ...

... In the old days when war and its consequences, brutality and conquest and enslavement of a people, were accepted as belonging to the natural order of events, there was no particular need to cover them or justify them from some other point of view. With the growth of higher standards the need for justification has arisen, and it leads to a perversion of facts, sometimes deliberate, often unconscious\textsuperscript{57}.

So Nehru accounts for the inherent biases behind colonial history. But what about nationalist historiography?

"Indians" he wrote, "are peculiarly liable to accept tradition and report as history, uncritically and without sufficient examination\textsuperscript{58}. But "the impact of science and the modern world have brought a greater appreciation of facts, a more critical faculty, a weighing of evidence, a refusal to accept tradition merely because it is tradition"\textsuperscript{59}. However, Nehru is quick to point out that many "competent historians ... err on the other side and their work is more a meticulous chronicle of facts than living history"\textsuperscript{60}. He doesn't explain what this living history would be, but elsewhere he speaks of the need for a "living philosophy" which shouldn't remain "unconnected with the day-to-day problems of life and the needs of men and women"\textsuperscript{61}. We can read it as an understanding of history which takes into account present day issues and how these issues re-orient our need to re-examine the past and come out with new

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. p. 289
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. p. 104
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. p. 102-103
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. p. 103
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. p. 31
perspectives. This is precisely what Nehru himself undertakes to do in The Discovery, which is unique in its attempt to look at the past in the light of present day concerns. In this way we find Nehru trying to grasp how "nationalist" historiography might come to address what Benedict Anderson calls the "philosophical poverty" of nationalism.

In an Indian writing of history, Nehru would definitely not be in favour of a right-wing glorification of the past. He would also steer away from the Orientalist notions about India's cultural attributes, and for that very reason, would not hesitate to call India both "metaphysical" and "religious", as well as highlighting the traditions of reason in the philosophies of the past.

Nehru, as Chatterjee has shown, and as mentioned before, counters the Orientalist thematic by saying how India "it is said, is religious, philosophical, speculative, metaphysical, unconcerned with this world, and lost in dreams of the beyond ... and perhaps those who tell us so would like India to remain plunged in thought and speculation, so that they might possess this world". But immediately afterwards, Nehru does add: "Yes, India has been all this but also much more than this". The dichotomy of Orientalist thought is collapsed within the context of the Indian "nationalist" thematic, as opposing elements are integrated within the framework of Indian culture.

To bring back an earlier point to context, Chatterjee's view that Nehru negativizes the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of Indian culture against the scientific and rational, and hence betrays a post-Enlightenment discourse

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63 Chatterjee, Partha, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?, OUP, Delhi, 1996, p. 134
64 Nehru, Jawaharlal, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p. 152
of knowledge, is a rash argument. Nehru has highlighted both, the traditions of reason in Indian philosophy along with the metaphysical and the poetic, in positive terms. What he pointed out was how in course of time, the rational side of thinking was given up in favour of the purely ritual and instrumentalist rigidities of religious thought:

"A rational spirit of inquiry, so evident in earlier times, which might well have led to the further growth of science, is replaced by irrationalism and a blind idolatry of the past"\textsuperscript{65}.

Nehru does criticize the "lack of historical sense" in the people of ancient India, but attaches a degree of importance to "the speculative and ethical trends of philosophy and religion", which he contends was "far more difficult" though "inevitably more vaguer and more indefinite", but "often very critical and sometimes skeptical"\textsuperscript{66}.

Let us now look at how Nehru introduces the phenomenon of modernity and in that light see how he constructs the issues confronting colonialism. In a way, the two overlap each other as is inevitable. However, one thing is perhaps important to note that though *The Discovery* is a product of this confrontation with British colonialism and the advent of modernity in India, Nehru begins the narrative with an inward looking thrust, where the question of self-discovery becomes paramount in the face of the colonial situation, which brought in radical changes in India's social and cultural world. In this sense, it is a philosophical enquiry, aimed at a self-understanding, and of one's relationship with the world. This attitude is all but scientific, and in a way

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid. p. 54
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid. p. 102
militates against the strong prescriptions of scientific reason, which Nehru pleads for. This is the fundamental paradox of Nehru's narrative, more of which we shall discuss later in this Chapter.

Let's now turn to how Nehru makes a distinction between British colonialism and the baggage of modernity:

"The impact of western culture on India was the impact of a dynamic society, a 'modern' consciousness, on a static society wedded to medieval habits of thought which, however sophisticated and advanced in its own way, could not progress because of its inherent limitations. And, yet, curiously enough the agents of this historic process, were not only wholly unconscious of their mission in India, but, as a class, actually represented no such process. In England their class fought this historic process but the forces opposed to them were too strong and could not be held back. In India they had a free field and were successful in applying the brakes to that very change and progress which, in the larger context, they represented. They encouraged and consolidated the position of the socially reactionary groups in India, and opposed all those who worked for political and social change. If change came it was in spite of them or as an incidental and unexpected consequence of their activities. The introduction of the steam engine and the railway was a big step towards a change of the medieval structure, but it was intended to consolidate their rule and facilitate the exploitation for their own benefit of the interior of the country."\(^{67}\).

\(^{67}\) Ibid. p. 291
We are again faced with a narrative, which sounds close to the colonial narrative on India. After all, British colonialists justified the ideological content of their rule through the dichotomy between the "dynamic" and the "static". But again, we have to make a difference between Nehru's perspective and the colonialist's. The colonialist presented the dichotomy as part of their grand narrative of colonialism. Nehru's observation is analytical and critical. It fundamentally counters the colonial narrative by positing liberation against domination, even if faced with similar perspectives regarding the state of Indian society. It raises a crucial question, whether representation of a certain kind automatically opens up justifications for domination. The relationship between representation and domination includes the question of intentionality and agency. In Nehru's case, the thematic of the intentional object, the Indian "nation", is represented in a self-critical as well as self-evolutionary manner, dissolving the Orientalist dichotomy between the east and the west in ethnocentric and essentialist terms, as has been pointed out. The notion of agency works, in Nehru's case, through this anti-colonial consciousness that is ideological, without however being relativistic about choices. It means, in Nehru, the idea of choices is not bound by a historical antagonism but rather open to a plurality where the merits of choices are made out of the rational position of one's own subjective freedom with regard to choices. In this, the question of power is seen to be not holding authority either to one's subjective position or to the way choices are made. Hence the idea of cross-cultural choices is always a rational possibility in Nehru. Intentionality, in this context, itself grants autonomy to choices made from within the forms of interaction between western knowledge and Indian predicaments. We cannot look at the question of autonomy "outside" the interaction between the West and India,
unless we are being ethnocentric. Chatterjee calls the ideology of Indian nationalist discourse "inauthentic" because of its "lack of autonomy". But autonomy is always the autonomy to choose, and if values are not ethnocentric, then the choice of values need not be based on an ethnocentric difference of power as well. What is being argued here is that any subject position cannot be presupposed either as an inauthenticity or within a privileged space of autonomy with regard to choices as autonomy itself arises out of one's ability to choose prior to value judgments against it. In other words, it is against the intentionality of someone else's intentions that one chooses to make oneself autonomous. We cannot choose outside this situation and therefore to call a discourse inauthentic becomes an absolutist argument. Between ethnocentrism and an a priori notion of universalism lie what Michel Walzer calls "reiterative universality". Even Chatterjee pronounces the desire of an ideological critique of nationalist thought, which would "connect" the "popular strength" of nationalist struggles to "the consciousness of a new universality".

In whatever terms Chatterjee might see this new universality, the very appeal to and recognition of universality entails a "relation" which is being drawn here. Again, even if one does not put forward any normative idea behind that relation - which Chatterjee doesn't - it is still necessary to address what is meant by universality and why is it necessary. This would immediately bring up normative and other issues of the "relation" which Chatterjee has avoided.

68 Tamir, Yale, Liberal Nationalism, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 199, p.90
69 Chatterjee, Partha, The Nation and its Fragments, OUP, India, 1990
In the last passage from Nehru where he makes the distinction between British colonialism and the baggage of modernity, there appears a distinction between a non-specific site of Western culture as it traveled into India, as different from a more specific category of "agents", in this context, a "class" of British colonialists, who were responsible for the entry of that culture. But as a class, the British colonialists did not represent the modern consciousness. In fact, according to Nehru, the modern consciousness came with its progressive elements "in spite of" the preventive measures of colonial rulers.

The example of the steam engine, in spite of its instrumental value for the colonizers, becomes a "value" even for Nehru, against the "medieval structure". It will be pointed out immediately that here Nehru is attaching value to technology. The point is true. But if we leave it here, a crucial issue to which Nehru draws our attention will be missed. How does the introduction of steam engine become a "big step" towards change in the medieval structure? Though Nehru doesn’t furnish us with the reason, the answer is easily found in our knowledge of the caste system. Earlier, people of higher castes refused to travel along with those of the lower castes. But the railway system, along with other modern forms of transportation, forced people to travel together.

The modern forms of transportation in India brought in a sense of cultural democracy. It cannot be seen merely as a rational process in itself but an intervention into the rationality of religious social structure itself. In fact, in this and other regard, the relationship between reason and religion, with reason used as a handmaid of religion, need to be studied. It is to highlight how religious arguments are couched in moral-universal terms by an a priori knowledge of human beings which is put under a justificatory scheme which is quite rational in its argumentation of forcing down laws. But reason here is
merely the instrument of a priori values that come before those arguments are made, being held to be sanctimonious.

Once the provincial thought of Europe becomes universal philosophy it confronts in its universality the heterogeneity of cultures, and for that very reason, the definitive aspects of culture re-orient the norm of universality into a plural discourse. The nation-state need not be taken as a “single determinate form” of community, but it is also important to note that a certain history has forced cultures within the construction of a nation to negotiate its issues within a nationalist framework. The nation as an “imagined community” does rest upon a plural cultural discourse of localities. Since the nature of modernity was similar “from the outside”, a singular frame of reference did form against which cultures responded in various manners. In this, the economic nature of modernity, which coincides with capitalism, indeed turned out to be a homogenizing problem. But at the level of cultural identities, the problem was different: taking culture to be as definitive as capital, we find the issue of modernity breaking up into two, namely, the problem of capitalism and of culture. The “politics” of the state, if not its statute, and the cultural aspects which form the nature of that politics, have more or less retained their local forms in India. They coincide. Modernity has forced communities to negotiate under a new paradigm. Democracy has brought in a new equation to the power discourse within communities, where the suppressed can speak, and it is impossible for modernity not to have left its mark on this very possibility of cultures to address the question of power within itself as well as in their relationship with the state. Modernity has opened up “new spaces” within communities, where a group for example is not necessarily at an
advantage against an individual. Here, a chasm between the language of demands and the language of the state is bound to appear. This chasm appears precisely because the language of demands would be more rooted in an emergent cultural manner of articulation whereas the state would try to put them into a more generalized language of laws where principles would be formed both out of negotiation as well as certain a priori directions of political rule.

Let us now look at the other aspects of how Nehru looks at the coming of modernity.

According to Nehru, the pre-war economic situation in the country was one where India "became progressively ruralized"70. The British parliament excluded Indian goods from getting into Britain, which included the overall foreign market, and instead made British goods flow into the country. This made craftsmen and artisans move towards the land. This led, Nehru writes, to an ever-growing disproportion between agriculture and industry.

Nehru’s reading of this phenomenon arises from the following observations:

"In every progressive country there has been, during the past century, a shift of population from agriculture to industry; from village to town; in India this process was reversed"71. Nehru finds that “our crisis in agriculture, grave as it is, is interlinked with the crisis in industry, out of which it arose”72. This has happened because:

70 Nehru, Jawaharlal, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p. 299
71 Ibid. p. 299
72 Ibid. p. 301
"The crisis in industry spread rapidly to the land and became a permanent crisis in agriculture. Holdings became smaller and smaller, and fragmentation proceeded to an absurd and fantastic degree. The burden of agricultural debt grew and ownership of the land often passed to moneylenders. The number of landless labourers increased by the million. India was under an industrial-capitalist period, minus many of the wealth producing elements of precapitalist economy. She became a passive agent of modern industrial capitalism, suffering all its ills and with hardly any of its advantages."

So for Nehru, it wasn't possible to go back against the trajectory of industrialization. He wasn't aiming for self-sufficiency, but increased production of goods.

The promise of productivity that the capitalist system had triggered off but withheld out of colonial interests had to be acquired back through nationalist production. It was the only "progressive" option to Nehru. Chatterjee finds the nature of this choice, neither "a matter of moral or aesthetic choice" but "a simple fact of modern life, determined globally by the conditions of modern-day economic production." He quotes Nehru:

"It can hardly be challenged that, in the context of the modern world, no country can be politically and economically independent, even within the framework of international interdependence, unless it is highly industrialized and has developed its power resources to the utmost..."
Chatterjee finds Nehru bowing down to this deterministic choice already dictated by ‘the spirit of the age’. He quotes Nehru again, in this regard:

“Any argument as to the relative merits of small-scale and large-scale industry seems strangely irrelevant today, when the world and the dominating facts of the situation that confront it have decided in favour of the latter”76.

Nehru however does put the economic issue in social terms:

“The real question is not one of quantitative adjustment and balancing of various incongruous elements and methods of production, but a qualitative change-over to something different and new, from which various social consequences flow. The economic and political aspects of this qualitative change are important, but equally important are the social and psychological aspects. In India especially, where we have been wedded far too long to past forms and modes of thought and action, new experiences, new processes, leading to new ideas and new horizons, are necessary”77.

So for Nehru, industrialization would be an important factor to bring about a social change. Here again, the emphasis is on the change in the medieval structure. Nehru thought that along with the problem of excess labour which industrialization can absorb, the quality of life itself would improve. For him, industrialization and social progress became synonymous. He was also anxious of India standing up to the West in this regard: “An industrially backward country will continually upset the world equilibrium and encourage

76 Ibid. p. 144
77 Nehru, Jawaharlal, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p.408-409
the aggressive tendencies of more developed countries. For Nehru then, the modern economic structure is one that will help achieve two ends: a modern society of economic co-operation, which would lead to social co-operation both at the national as well as international level. It was also an issue of the balance of power vis-à-vis the international scene. So it was also a purely realist issue. In aesthetic terms, Nehru was interested in the rising of the standard of living. The cultural indicator somehow vanishes into the need for modern industrial life. Nehru found the modern form of industrial growth as one where he felt our minds will become active and adventurous. Nehru here sounds like a quixotic spirit of modernity. In fact, it is Nehru’s vehement faith over the power of modern industry, which is quite marked.

However, Nehru introduces another element in the picture: the need for planning. This is the socialist turn in Nehru’s economic ideas. To begin with however: “The original idea behind the Planning Committee had been to further industrialization.” Nehru laid down the basic principles behind the idea of planning in these terms:

"(O)ur plan, as it developed, was inevitably leading us towards establishing some of the fundamentals of the socialist structure. It was limiting the acquisitive factor in society, removing many of the barriers to growth, and thus leading to a rapidly expanding social structure. It was based on planning for the benefit of the common man, raising his standards greatly, giving him opportunities for growth, and releasing an enormous amount of latent talent and capacity. And all this was to be attempted in the context of democratic

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78 Ibid. p. 407
79 Ibid. p. 396
freedom and with a large measure of co-operation of some at least of the groups who were normally opposed to socialist doctrine"\textsuperscript{80}.

Chatterjee quotes Nehru on how he found "the spirit of co-operation of the members of the Planning Committee .. particularly soothing and gratifying", and Nehru found it "a pleasant contrast to the squabbles and conflicts of politics"\textsuperscript{81}. In this, Chatterjee finds Nehru's approach to planning as "a realist's utopia... a utopia supremely statist, where the function of government was totally abstracted out of the messy business of politics and established in its pristine purity as rational decision-making conducted through the most advanced operational techniques provided by the sciences of economic management"\textsuperscript{82}.

As far as Nehru's analysis of the Indian economic situation is concerned, one needs to look through the works of those times, like R. Palme Dutt's \textit{The Problem of India}, to find out similarities. We are not concerned with those comparisons here. As far as the history of planning is concerned, it was first implemented in the erstwhile Soviet state. There it was as supremely statist an enterprise as Nehru envisioned it in India. Of course, on ideological similarities, India was not a socialist country. It was anyway still under British appendage. According to Chatterjee, Nehru's economic ideas became "a particularly useful theoretical foothold from which ... (he) could reach out and embrace the rationalist and egalitarian side of Marxism, leaving its political core well alone"\textsuperscript{83}. Sanjay Seth has responded to Chatterjee's argument

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid. p. 400 (italics mine)
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid. p. 399
\textsuperscript{82} Chatterjee, Partha, \textit{Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?}, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p. 160
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid. p. 145
about Nehru being "deliberately selective" in his "appropriation of Marxism". Seth has asserted that Nehru's thought being consistent and coherent in its use of Marxism was equally consistently and coherently a non-Marxist politics. He feels that in colonies where Marxism was not a critique of modernity and where it was shorn of a distinctive political core, such appropriation of Marxism by nationalism is welcome\textsuperscript{84}. In this context, we leave the debate here with Nehru's own understanding regarding his "appropriation" of Marxist principles along with his fundamental commitment to the idea of democracy.

In one of his famous lectures Nehru said:

"Marx was primarily moved by the ghastly conditions that prevailed in the early days of industrialization in Western Europe. At that time there was no truly democratic structure of the state, and changes could hardly be made constitutionally. Hence, revolutionary violence offered the only way to change. Marxism therefore, inevitably thought in terms of a violent revolution. Since then, however, political democracy has spread bringing with it the possibility of peaceful change ... The democratic structure of the state, organized labour and, above all, the urge for social justice as well as scientific and technological progress, have brought about this transformation"\textsuperscript{85}.

In The Discovery, Nehru specified:


\textsuperscript{85} Nehru, Jawaharlal, India Today and Tomorrow, Azad Memorial Lectures, 1959, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1960, p. 13
“Even a complete nationalization (so-called) of industry unaccompanied by political democracy will lead to a different kind of exploitation, for while industry will then belong to the state, the state itself will not belong to the people.”

In Chatterjee’s schema there is no place for a distinction between a statist approach that is realist in an instrumentalist sense, and one that involves a fundamental commitment to democracy. The point of argument is, that Chatterjee looks at the statist approach as one where political ends serve their own purpose without holding onto any principle as its desired end, whereas a commitment to democracy would use the means-ends equation with a specific normative thrust in mind. Let’s leave the issue by pointing out that in Nehru, the distinction is primary, and is in favour of the latter.

For Nehru, Chatterjee says, the primacy of the economic question is behind his understanding of most social questions. Chatterjee holds Nehru’s response to the communal problem as the key indicator to this problem. He quotes Nehru:

"Having assured the protection of religion and culture, etc., the major problems that were bound to come up were economic ones which had nothing to do with a person’s religion.”

The key word here is “protection”. It is a statist approach to the problem of representing communal identities. But this approach takes it away from the merely economic consideration that Chatterjee holds with regard to Nehru.

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86 Nehru, Jawaharlal, The Discovery, OUP, 1964, p. 502
87 Chatterjee, Partha, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p. 141
For Akeel Bilgrami, Nehru’s neutrality based statist approach “is an imposition rather in the sense that it assumed that secularism stood outside the substantive arena of political commitments”\textsuperscript{88}. He critiques Nehru, not for his secular approach, but “with imposing a non-negotiated secularism”\textsuperscript{89}. In this, Bilgrami is more unsure than Chatterjee that the so-called representatives of a religious community could be a valid group of representatives.

At a more general level, Nehru’s concerns were:

“The real problems for me remain problems of individual and social life, of a proper balancing of an individual’s inner and outer life, of an adjustment of the relationship between individuals and groups, of a continuous becoming something better and higher of social development, of the ceaseless adventure of man”\textsuperscript{90}.

Hence we see Nehru interested in an individualism, which is not the alienated social being, but one aiming for “harmony” (surely a romantic conception). The ideal is “social development”. Nehru highlights the notion of duty regarding the individual, as much as the basic issue of rights. We will stretch this notion of individualism further in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} chapter.

\textbf{“What is this India”:}

In this section we would look at the various ways in which Nehru constructs the meaning of “India”. We would deliberately make a chronological reading of how Nehru engages with the word “India” through \textit{The Discovery}, to place the

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. p.
\textsuperscript{90} Nehru, Jawaharal, \textit{The Discovery}, OUP, 1964, p. 31
crucial moments of the text in perspective. In Nehru, the subjective and representational "meaning" of India is put both in personal and general terms at the beginning and the end of the text. This marks it against the rest of the text where India is mentioned in the matter-of-factly manner, and in quasi-nationalist terms. But as we propose to show, Nehru does not strictly define nor represent India in nationalist terms. The aim here is also to show that just as Stuart Hall has pointed out how the notion of "The West" is also an idea, a concept, Nehru's concept of "India" is also a representational mode which seeks an independent classification, and not the borrowed generality of being an "Orient". But — and this is the crucial aspect — unlike the "voyages of discovery" by Europe, as it sought the "domination of the globe", which resulted in the entire discourse of Orientalism, Nehru's is an inward voyage, a voyage which, unlike the dominant sociological attitude of Western civilization, is based upon a historical self-seeking discourse of meaning. Hence, it is against this sociological (and not the schools of western philosophy) West, which created the representational narrative of the East and the West, that Nehru's discovery bears the crucial marks of resistance and self-evolution.

In *The Discovery*, Nehru embarks upon answering a question that is, to begin with, a personal one: "What is my inheritance? To what am I a heir?" He immediately proceeds to answer the premises:

"To all that humanity has achieved during tens of thousands of years, to all that has it has thought and felt and suffered and taken pleasure in, to its cries of triumph and bitter agonies of defeat, to that astonishing adventure of man

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92 Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery*, OUP, 1964, p. 36
which began so long ago and yet continues and beckons to us. To all this and
more, in common with all men.”

This is the Romantic subjectivist Nehru, with a marked universality of
belonging, and a desire for "a kind of unity across persons or across time". However Nehru quickly adds:

“But there is a special heritage for those of us in India, not an exclusive one,
for none is exclusive and all are common to the race of man, one more
especially applicable to us, something that is in our flesh and blood and
bones, that has gone to make us what we are and what we are likely to be”.

Nehru treats India's cultural identity as distinct but not relative. The idea of
universality is again implicit in Nehru's lines. Since we are looking at the issue
in a more subjective context, we can once again raise the issue of universality
differently: Is Nehru innocent of the ideological implications behind borrowing
the universalist discourse of a colonial power?

In the preface of Asish Nandy's The Intimate Enemy we find a quotation from
Albert Camus: “Through a curious transposition peculiar to our times, it is
innocence that is called upon to justify itself.” He then lays down his own
premise: "The two essays here justify and defend the innocence which
confronted modern western colonialism and it's various psychological
offshoots in India." Nandy is trying to point out the "innocence" of the
colonized in combating colonialism. It is an innocence that is ideological and

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93 Ibid. p. 35
94 Ibid. p. 36-37
96 Ibid. p. i.

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yet it is through this innocence that the ideological battle against colonialism was launched. This paradox of innocence creates a paradox regarding the receiving of the colonial ideology in the first place. We can see a good example with regard to the issue of universality. The notion of universality in the colonial discourse stems from the Enlightenment idea of reason and the ideological baggage of colonialism as a symbol of progress vis-à-vis universal history. But Indian nationalism countered an ethnocentric colonial discourse of domination where universality is posed only in terms of European dominance and not the freedom of the colonized. In Nehru’s response, the idea of universality gets based on a different “context”: the reiteration of a universality which in not European, hence not ethnocentric, and one which stems from a realization of the contradiction in the colonial discourse and the universalistic values of freedom enshrined in the Enlightenment. As we have shown, in Nehru, culture is as definitive in this anti-colonial discourse as capital, and reserves a partial autonomy in its critique of colonialism. Hence the discourse of reason becomes both contextual in historical terms, and retains its universalistic appeal against the ethnocentric logic of colonialism. Nandy holds Nehru among the rationalist brigade of Indian nationalists who borrowed the dominant, rationalist and masculinist strand of western colonial baggage (and in turn the same strand in his own culture), unlike those like Gandhi whom Nandy approvingly places among those who had imbibed the dormant, feminine strand of their own as well as of western culture. We have discussed the terms in which Nehru accepts universality. Without further going into the merits of Nandy’s view here, it’s possible to read Nandy against the grain as polemically as his own, and make an overarching point. One would like to ask Nandy, why should there be a bigger problem about those nationalists
imbibing dominant western (and Indian) cultural strands in the ideological battle against colonialism as against those who imbibed recessive ones, if innocence indeed is the issue. Unless of course Nandy would wish to differentiate between degrees of innocence, which he doesn’t. It appears that the “cunning” of reason, which Chatterjee feels is not curbed by nationalist discourse, does seem to meet its match in anti-colonial “innocence” within the ideological framework of anti-colonial nationalist thought.

To come back to Nehru’s personal quest, India surfaces once again in the following manner:

“During these years of thought and activity my mind has been full of India, trying to understand her and to analyze my own reactions towards her”\(^ {97} \). And further: “I became obsessed with the thought of India. What was this India that possessed me and beckoned to me continually, urging me to action so that we might realize some vague but deeply felt desire in our hearts? The initial urge came to me, I suppose, through pride, both individual and national, and the desire, common to all men, to resist another’s domination and have freedom to live the life of one’s choice\(^ {98} \).

Here we find, the notion of subjectivity is split into two domains: individual and national. The two domains are of course overlapping, yet distinct as categories. In Nehru, the individual and the national urge still however did not answer the specific question, which “India” posed. India was still a “thought” without a clear content, except a reason to action and a vague desire. So far we see only a deep sense of subjective feeling in Nehru, behind the drive to

\(^ {97} \) Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery*, OUP, 1964, p. 49
\(^ {98} \) Ibid. p. 49
unearth the meaning of "India". It was a reason, paradoxically, submerged in subjectivist depths. The obsession with the "thought of India" is a desperate attempt to create meaning from an entity, which resists meaning. India is difficult to grasp, to represent in thought, and hence becomes transcendental to any historical category of meaning. It is almost like a metaphysical idea, hanging over its own reality. Nehru tries to retrieve some personal link for himself, through the emotional elements of pride and desire, so that the historical predicaments of freedom and domination could be addressed. It was important to understand the meaning of India to bring it into history, and provide the cultural grid of the nationalist discourse.

He says, for example: "My reaction to India thus was often an emotional one, conditioned and limited in many ways. It took the form of nationalism. In the case of many people the conditioning and limiting factors are absent. But nationalism was and is inevitable in the India of my day; it is a natural and healthy growth. For any subject country national freedom must be the first and dominant urge; for India, with her intense sense of individuality and a past heritage, it was doubly so."99

Here it would be wrong to interpret the word "form" in the conceptual sense. Nehru is undoubtedly using the word in a loose manner. The relationship between trying to grasp the "meaning" of India and work out a principle of nationalism is an open one in Nehru's case.

Nehru slowly thickens the narrative by asking, this time, more directional questions:

99 Ibid. p. 52
"What is this India, apart from her physical and geographical aspects? What did she represent in the past? What gave strength to her then? How did she lose that old strength? And has she lost it completely? Does she represent anything vital now, apart from being the home of a vast number of human beings? How does she fit into the modern world?"  

Nehru is seeking more control of the narrative here. He is interested in what India "represented" in the past, and by this, for the first time objectifies the subject. In the following four questions Nehru begins on a representational mode to his enquiry, supplements it by looking for reasons behind the trajectory of his enquiry, and finally anxious to find clues of recovering a new relation: he holds India as being strong in the past; he wants to know the reasons of that strength; he wants to know how strength was lost and whether it has been lost for good; whether India had anything vital to offer at present; and in what ways would she "fit" modernity. Here the subjective element is totally replaced. India now represents an objective problem, which needs researching. But so far, India is still empty of content except historical time. The content that knocks at India's door is modernity. To relate India with that content (and context), Nehru has to now find out what constitutes "this India" from the past till the present moment.  

But before Nehru could embark upon the business of discovering India, he once again draws the personal link of the narrative, where the "I" as a subject makes the subject of discovery a project of the self:

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100 Ibid. p. 49
"India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively thrilled me. And yet I approached her almost as an alien critic, full of dislike for the present as well as for many of the relics of the past that I saw. To some extent I came to her via the West, and looked at her as a friendly westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts arose within me. Did I know India? – I who presumed to scrap much of her past heritage?"¹⁰¹

Nehru draws a relation of kinship with India, and yet approaches the relationship like an "alien critic". Nehru is sure of his kinship with India, but is unsure about his "knowledge" about India. Knowledge about India was crucial in terms of the second order relationship: that of the partly alien critic. The Nehruvian self in this discourse is thus split into two: the self that "belongs" and the self that is "critical". Knowledge is the bridge between the two selves. The discourse of The Discovery is thus premised upon the desire for the knowledge of India. This knowledge is however part of self-knowledge. Nehru already belongs to India but also seeks to evaluate and re-establish the relationship. Hence the relationship between Nehru's self-knowledge and the knowledge he seeks about India is both subjective and objective. Nehru is primarily interested in the "relationship" between belonging and criticism. Belonging, for Nehru, seems to be the justificatory aspect behind criticism. The discourse of Nehru's sense of belonging is what we turn to next.

In a pilgrim's mode, Nehru describes his forays into India's ancient past. He "journeyed through India in the company of mighty travelers from China and Western and Central Asia who came in the remote past and left records of

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 50
their travels"; he “wandered over the Himalayas, which are connected with old myth and legend”; he “visited old monuments and ruins and ancient sculptures and frescoes – Ajanta, Ellora, the Elephanta Caves… where every stone told its story of India’s past”; at Sarnath he “would almost see the Buddha preaching his first sermon”; also "Ashoka’s pillars of stone with their inscriptions would speak … in their magnificent language”; and at Fatehpur-Sikri he visualized “Akbar, forgetful of his empire, seated holding converse and debate with the learned of all faiths”\textsuperscript{102}.

In the essay “Nation and Imagination”, Dipesh Chakrabarty has interrogated the plurality of the category of “imagination” as used in the context of nationalism by Benedict Anderson\textsuperscript{103}. He places Tagore’s poetic incarnation of India in the phenomena of “darshan” (‘seeing beyond’), where “the function of the poetic”, Chakrabarty explains, “was to create a caesura in historical time and transport us to a realm that transcends the historical” and what Tagore calls “the ‘eternal’”\textsuperscript{104}. Chakrabarty considers it as one of the “plural and heterogeneous ways of seeing, not all of which may be captured by the mentalist category of imagination”\textsuperscript{105}. Chakrabarty further explains, for those who capture this phenomenon, “it is a practice that, while creating a sense of history, also takes them outside of historical time”\textsuperscript{106}. We can now see Nehru’s pilgrim narrative at times concurring to the same phenomenon as he describes his visionary moments in the face of past relics. These real moments of encounter where the past echoes in the present, transports Nehru’s vision into a time beyond real historical experience, yet one where

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. p. 50-52
\textsuperscript{103} Chakrabarty, Dipesh, Studies in History, 15, 2, n.s. (1999), Sage Publications, New Delhi, p. 177
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. p. 178
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. p. 177
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. p. 205
history reverberates. Of course Nehru does not use an ecstatic language associated with a mystical vision. But the experience, as it surfaces in Nehru's language, does suggest an aesthetic communion that is crowded with voices from a "beyond" and is suggestive of visionary effects. It certainly speaks of transformative moments in which Nehru could "see beyond". So Nehru's discourse of belonging, which begins with recognition of historical kinship, proceeds to articulate that sense through the romantic sojourns of a traveler, and finally lights up as a *daarshanik* (visionary) mode of subjective relationship.

A few pages later, Nehru is still far from the critical engagement he would begin with India. He can be seen in a speculative mood about what India stands for:

"Whether there was such a thing as an Indian dream through the ages, vivid and full of life or sometimes reduced to the murmurings of troubled sleep, I do not know. Every people and every nation has some such belief or myth of national destiny and perhaps it's partly true in each case. Being an Indian I am myself influenced by this reality or myth about India, and I feel that anything that had the power to mould hundreds of generations, without a break, must have drawn its enduring vitality from some deep well of strength, and have the capacity to renew that vitality from age to age".107

Nehru consciously realizes that the "belief" of national destiny might very well be a "myth". He therefore fuses the rational idea of constructing a realistic nationalist goal with a mythical idea of historical regeneration. The more

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conscious realization of the nationalist dream, which is "vivid and full of life", is fused with an unconscious element of the "murmurings of troubled sleep". The objective element of this view of a national destiny runs parallel to a subjective one. However, the language is not embedded in a religious imagery. Nehru, as pointed out before, treats the word "Indian" as a culturally hybrid identity, and steers clear of any particular religious identity. But here, any cultural construct is not in issue: the usual elements linked to nation as a concept, whether subjectively as consciousness or objectively as the coming together of what Ernest Renan calls "a series of convergent facts", is fused with a mythical and unconscious notion. We can say that in Nehru's discourse, the nation partly dissolves in a myth, or lives alongside one. The name of that myth is "India".

Then we come to a famous imagery in The Discovery where Nehru calls India an "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". This imagery of India, if read vis-à-vis any notion of a nation, seems to make a point about vanishing yet inerasable layers of narratives. The imagery echoes what Homi Bhabha calls the "impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical" image of the nation where "nations, like narratives lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye". He has mentioned in The Discovery how ideas across civilizations

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were borrowed. This is a history of both writings and erasures, both sign and trace.

From here we would move on to one of the famous episodes in The Discovery, which has inspired reactions from critics. It is the "Bharat Mata" episode:

"Often as I wandered from meeting to meeting I spoke to my audience of this India of ours, of Hindustan and of Bharat, the old Sanskrit name derived from the mythical founder of the race. I seldom did so in cities, for there the audiences were more sophisticated and wanted stronger fare. But to the peasant, with his limited outlook, I spoke of this great country for whose freedom we were struggling, of how each part differed from the other and yet was India, of common problems of the peasants from north to south and east to west, of the Swaraj, the self-rule that could only be for all and every part and not for some...

Sometimes as I reached a gathering, a great roar of welcome would greet me: Bharat Mata ki Jai – Victory to Mother India! I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this Bharat Mata, Mother India, whose victory they wanted? My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then, not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me. I persisted my questioning. At last a vigorous Jat, wedded to the soil from immemorial generations, would say that it was the dharti, the good earth of India, that they meant. What earth? Their particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or the whole of India? And so question and answer went on, till they would ask me impatiently to tell them all about it.
would endeavour to do so and explain that India was all this that they had thought, but it was much more. The mountains and the rivers of India, and the forests and the broad fields, which gave us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this *Bharat Mata*, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves *Bharat Mata*, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery

Dipesh Chakrabarty interprets the passage as one where,

"Nehru assumed that the matter of being in the presence of Bharat Mata was a conceptual problem. He reduced practice to mere belief. He overlooked the fact that the word dharti, meaning the earth, could not be reduced to the specific geographical boundaries of British India and found the concept empty of content. He proceeded to fill it up with the material proper to nationalist thought. This was, in Bhabha’s terms, a pedagogic moment of nationalism."

I read Nehru’s interpreting of *Bharat Mata* at the level of representation. The peasant’s answer that his *dharti* was Bharat Mata speaks of an age-old idea of the *dharti* as the immediate land of livelihood. It symbolized two things for them: the *dharti* as *karam bhoomi* (place of labour) and the *dharti* as a place for *balidan* (sacrifice). Chatterjee interprets the same passage polemically in terms of Nehru’s rhetorical politics and calls it, like everything else about

Nehru, a "rationalist construction". Chatterjee doesn't give us any analysis of the peasant's version of this imagery. He however, sympathetically viewed the nationalist intelligentsia's representation of the nation as mother, "charged with a deeply religious semiotic" which Nehru fails to understand. What Chatterjee fails to point out however is that this 19th century Hindu revivalist imagery of the nation as mother comes from a very "logical" modernist fusion of the essentialist notion of the all-suffering yet strength-providing mother, and the gendered notion of the nation as a symbol of maternal power and sacrifice. The peasant's idea of the dharti as mother is a comparatively naturalistic symbol, outside as it is of elitist cultural imagery. The problem in Nehru's response however seems to be the hierarchization of the notion of dharti as operating under a larger cultural boundary of the nation, where an imagined community is taken as a higher framework of reference than a face-to-face community. Nehru however, unlike what Chakrabarty asserts, doesn't reduce "practice to mere belief". He replaces one framework with another, of course considering that Chakrabarty feels peasants can't imagine a complex structure of dharti as mother in whatever sense of the symbolic. One should add that Nehru's representation of Bharat Mata is a quasi-democratic one, where the meaning of land is re-spiritualized under the anthropocentric category. The notion of India, through the slogan of Bharat Mata, finds meaning in popular parlance, as a way of identification and imagining, but it was more of a physical and human reality. Nehru was after what lay "beyond" this reality, this screen of history within history, where the meaning of India was till elusive, as if holding some secret.

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113 Chatterjee, Partha, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p. 147
114 Ibid. p. 147
After this incident, the narrative of India enters the nationalist discourse more thickly as Nehru goes into critically evaluate India. In these pages, “India” doesn’t appear as a representational category but as mere appendage to the discourse of nationalism. It is a matter of paradox, that India as an identity is only brought to surface in Nehru’s subjectivist moments and not when he is being the rationalist critic. The discourse of ‘nationalism’ finds Nehru focused and optimistic about merging the progressive ideas of state-rule with a harmonious national identity. The discovery of 'India' ends in the opposite manner, with Nehru delightfully and creatively battling the myth he couldn’t “unveil”. The epilogue raises the introductory question:

“The discovery of India – what have I discovered? It was presumptuous of me to imagine that I could unveil her and find out what she is to-day and what she was in the long past. To day she is four hundred million separate individual men and women, each differing from the other, each living in a private universe of thought and feeling. If this is so in the present, how much more difficult is it to grasp that multitudinous past of innumerable successions of human beings. Yet something has bound them together and binds them still. India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads. Overwhelmed again and again, her spirit was never conquered, and to-day when she appears to be a plaything of a proud conqueror, she remains unsubdued and unconquered. About her there is the elusive quality of a legend of long ago; some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive. There are terrifying glimpses of dark corridors which seem to lead
back to primeval night, but also there is the fullness and warmth of the day about her. Shameful and repellent she is occasionally, perverse and obstinate, sometimes even a little hysterical, this lady with a past. But she is very loveable, and none of her children can forget her wherever they go or whatever strange fate befalls them. For she is part of them in her greatness as well as her failings, and they are mirrored in those deep eyes of hers that have seen so much of life's passion and joy and folly, and looked down into wisdom's well. Each one of them is drawn to her, though perhaps each has a different reason for the attraction or can point to no reason at all, and each sees some different aspect of her many-sided personality."

After pages of arguing for science and rationality, albeit with moments of doubt and despair, Nehru seems to finally succumb to a purely subjectivist imagery. The objectivist approach totally collapses in the face of a strong, erotic imagery of a veiled mystery called "India". Nehru's imagery of India is gendered from the start. But that is not the most distinctive aspect of the discourse. With an evocative and rich sway of descriptions, Nehru fuses the primordial and the modern. The "multitudinous past of innumerable successions of human beings" today becomes the "four hundred million separate individual men and women". Nehru steers clear of any hegemonic or majoritarian idea of India. He maintains what Yael Tamir calls "normative diversity" in his imagining of the roots idea. Nehru has never had a purely individualistic conception of the nation-community. But he has treated the individual as a basic category among social and cultural formations. Here, allied to an excess of imagination, the discovery of India takes Nehru outside

the thematic and problematic of nationalism. It renders individuals their "private universe" in a purely subjectivist mode of narrativity. This subjectivity of the individual is not presented in terms of any rational autonomy but as an individual in his unique and specific imagining of India. There occurs a break between Nehru's constructivist approach of the nation-state, and the discovery of "India". India, in a way, de-constructs the nationalist part of the narrative. In fact Nehru leaves us wondering about India. India becomes an indeterminate concept. It is this rupture between the nationalist discourse and the idea of India, which is one of the most distinctive aspect of Nehru's narrative. But it precisely leaves us with a problem of imagining the nation. Having rendered India into a myth-language which is removed from the specificities of religion, race, region or any particular group, and laying down a free imaginative play of individuals lost within the nation, Nehru allows the image of India to escape any political connotation, whereas he consciously also tries to install a particular political regime with specific value-systems. He creates yet another rupture at the level of political imagination, which makes the "palimpsest" exist on its own and the politics within that palimpsest-ic universe to invent its own freewheeling exercise. What would have to be answered for in this kind of an image making, is how precisely is a political order in India justified through the discourse of the idea of India. What Nehru doesn't show is how politics and this idea of India goes or don't go together and how one definition might slide into the other.