Chapter 7
Upadhyay's Notion of Hindu-Catholic Identity: Critical Assessment

Introduction
After having investigated Upadhyay's notion of Hindu-Catholic identity in the previous chapters from various perspectives, now we are in a position to make a critical assessment of it. The guiding criteria of this critical appraisal will be the reasonableness of his synthesis. Examining the Hindu-Catholic identity of Upadhyay, at the core of which lies a compact set of ideas about the nature of nation, race, culture, religion, Self and Other, requires at the same time paying attention to the ideological underpinning of these complex dimensions. Upadhyay's notion of identity is examined against various theoretical perspectives. The question of identity is a complex theme and the focus here is limited to those aspects which pertain to our investigation from the viewpoint of social theories. Thus, the focus in this section consists in highlighting various conceptual and theoretical issues involved in the question of identity, mainly from the perspective of philosophy, anthropology and sociology. Further, the perspectives of these thinkers who represent a given position are not given in their entirety but selectively to highlight the issue under consideration.

This chapter comprises four main sections. The first section focuses on some of the important theoretical perspectives on identity. In the second section Upadhyay's notion of Indian national identity is examined. The third section assesses his notion of Hindu identity. And the final section examines the Hindu-Christian identity from the Catholic perspective.

1. Self and Identity: Theoretical Frameworks
Before we focus on the theoretical perspectives let us clarify some of the important concepts related to identity. The term 'identity' basically refers to a person's image, self-concept, self-definition or inner conviction, held as a whole or in relation to particular functions or roles.1

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This term, which does not stand in isolation, is related to other concepts such as subject, ego, self, which constitute a unity of a person. Identity has both individual and collective dimensions. In this section we shall focus on some theories of identity. There is a set of contrasting theoretical frameworks regarding identity which view our identities as ‘pre-given’ and as a matter of ‘choice’ respectively. The question involved here is: do we inherit our identities which leave little room for deciding alternative modes to choose from or do we actually possess freedom to decide and choose our self-identities from options available to us?

1.1 Identity as Pre-given

There seems to be a tendency in a considerable number of religious traditions to view identity inextricably bound to that of a given religious tradition. Communitarian approaches to identity often tend to acquire considerable power by presenting individual identity as inextricably bound up with that of the community. In this perspective, the reality of one’s identity is seen as something ‘given’ by the community or group to which one belongs and not of choice. This notion is presented by M. Sandel as follows: ‘Community describes not just what they have as fellow citizens but also what they are, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity.’

According to Sandel, selfhood is not something we choose; rather it is given and ‘discovered’ within the matrix of the community. In this view, the self...
cannot stand apart from the aims and attachments since the ends ordained by the community which constitute and define the self. However, there is room for discovery. The task of the socially constituted self is to choose between the ends already given; what is required of the person is to ‘discover’ and choose from these pre-given options and decide what kind of a person he or she really is. But in this view, the self cannot go beyond the limits and boundaries set by the community. Thus, the ‘independent self finds its limits laid down in those aims and attachments from which it cannot stand apart.’ From this viewpoint, distancing oneself from the history and destiny of one’s own group is a hazardous venture.

In this view, one’s identity is not something chosen but a ‘given’ or more concretely, ‘pre-given’; identity is something one ‘detects’ within the matrix of one’s community. Here, one’s identity is invariably bound up with the destiny of the community itself. In this thinking, identity comes before choice can be made. In other words, our identities have a ‘given-ness’ about it. We are born, so to say, without our choice, to given communities and social identities. There is a certain amount of ‘determinism’ involved here. Nationalism of various kinds – ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious – tends to foster this sort of identity amongst its adherents. Indeed, the problem becomes even more acute when the community exerts totalitarian control over people and allows no room for choices over identities.

1.2 Identity and the Question of Choice
However it is difficult to imagine that we are left without any choice at all in relation to our identities. Here identity needs to be understood not as a monolithic entity which claims our entire selves, but rather as a complex which has several constituent parts. Thus, I may be a male/female, a Hindu/Christian/Muslim/atheist, born in a particular culture, an Indian citizen, a cricket fan, a feminist, a social worker, an environmentalist, a teacher/student, historian/linguist/scientist/social scientist/laborer, a husband/wife, a father/mother. We tend to have multiple roles and commitments or what professor J. N. Mohanty terms as ‘layers of selfhood,’ which define and inform our identity. None of these single dimensions can exhaust our identity as an individual; our identities are the sum total of all its constituent parts.

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and perhaps more. This perspective postulates that we do have choices to decide the type of identities we want to commit ourselves to.\(^\text{10}\)

Some clarifications and qualifications are needed here. First, as Amartya Sen reminds us, significance of our choices does not mean that the choices we make must be once-for-all and permanent. Often our loyalties and self-definitions oscillate. Choosing can be, to some extent, the result of a process. Secondly, choices of self-definition and self-identity are not unrestricted. Indeed, there are limits to what we can choose to identify with, and perhaps even difficult limits still in persuading others to take us as something other than what they take us to be.\(^\text{11}\) As Sen points out, a Jewish person in Nazi Germany could have longed to be taken as a non-Jew to escape persecution or extermination. But such redefinition may not be within the reach of persons’ realistic options. Indeed, this is an extreme case. It is true that the real options we have about our identity are always limited by our looks, our circumstances, and our background and history.\(^\text{12}\)

However, even within the framework of our limits there are choices and decisions to be made. We come across moving accounts of countless ordinary people making choices in the face of fierce opposition and willing to pay a price for it.\(^\text{13}\) We need to discern whether choices exist at all, and to what extent these choices are real. Amartya Sen has argued that the belief that we have no choice on the matter of identity is not only mistaken, but may have very destructive implications:

\(^{10}\) French philosopher and historian made an interesting statement in 1982: “If I were younger,” said Foucault in the course of an interview, “I would have immigrated to the US.” When asked why, he answered: “I see possibilities. You don’t have a homogeneous intellectual and cultural life. As a foreigner, I don’t have to be integrated.” Cf., Ruby Lal and Gyan Pandey, “Who are We?” EPW, Vol. 39, no. 19 (May 8, 2004) pp. 1870-71, here, 1870.


\(^{13}\) Particularly poignant is the story of Mamt Nayak, a Dalit girl from Narsingpur village (Orrissa) who defied a caste ban and decided to cycle her way to college. Upper-caste Khanayas had ordered her not to ride a bicycle through the village. When she did, the village panchayat (local governing unit) threatened that the entire Dalit community would have to face social boycott. Her own aging father pleaded with her not to go against the wishes of the upper-caste people. Mamt appealed to the government and got its support in the form a police escort. Mamt could have chosen to obey the upper-caste domination; but she chose to defy the caste boundaries, allowing her own identity-boundaries to be redefined and relocated. A reporter describes the changed situation: “In Narsingpur on weekdays you can see a girl cycling through the fields on her way to college, a bag slung on her shoulder, a smile playing on her lips, a policewoman following her on a scooter. It is everything but ordinary.” See, Farzand Ahmed, “Cycle of Change,” India Today (September 19, 2005) 54-56.
If choices do exist and yet it is assumed that they are not there, the use of reasoning may well be replaced by uncritical acceptance of conformist behaviour, no matter how rejectable they may be. Typically such conformism may have conservative implications, protecting old customs and practices from intelligent scrutiny. Indeed, traditional inequalities, such as unequal treatment of women in sexist societies, often survive by making the respective identities, which may include subservient roles of the traditional underdog, matters of unquestioning acceptance, rather than reflective examination. But the unquestioned presumptions are merely unquestioned – not unquestionable.\(^{14}\)

As Sen has pointed out, to ‘deny plurality, choice and reasoning in identity can be source of repression, new and old, as well as a source of violence and brutality.’\(^{15}\) Our identity is not pre-given, but has to be continually re-established. More importantly, perhaps, the identity of a person is never closed, fixed once and for all; it is something that is in the process of being established and re-established. As Mohanty rightly points out, the identity of a person is a complex of various layers of identities nested into each other.\(^{16}\)

Most contemporary theories of identity, among other things, focus on the historical, social and cultural character of our identity. To use Geertz’s expression, we do not ‘float as bounded psychic entities, detached from [our] background.’\(^{17}\) Our identity is an attribute that is borrowed from our social setting and we are at a point of intersection of numerous social relationships. The way we characterize ourselves, by referring to our profession, our social status, our family relationships, and other features which serve to identify us are derived from the socio-cultural system to which we belong.\(^{18}\) Identity is never a fixed core; shifting terrain of identities does assume specific, concrete patterns, as in a kaleidoscope, against particular sets of historical, cultural and social circumstances. Our cultural identities are simultaneously our cultures in process, but they acquire specific meanings in a given context.\(^{19}\) Social phenomena such as ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious nationalism seek to fix and naturalize ‘difference’ and create monolithic identities and impermeable boundaries between


groups. We need to keep in mind some of these conceptual and theoretical nuances when we evaluate Upadhyay’s notion of identity in the following sections.

2. Upadhyay and National Identity
Against the backdrop of the theoretical frame of nationalism already dealt with in chapter 3 (sections 4 and 5), now we shall assess in this section Upadhyay’s notion of national identity which is deeply embedded in his concept of Hindu-Catholicism.

2.1 Identity and the Nation
One of the central features of the nationalist discourse is that it is concerned with identity, namely, they define who ‘we’ are. For the past two centuries or more, a good deal of nationalist rhetoric and considerable amount of blood has been expended to demonstrate that our national identity is the primary form of identity available to us. This type of discourse, which is very much present in India today in the right-wing political ideologies, also tells us that national identity underlies and informs all our other identities, and in case of conflict it should take priority over them. We need to ask: what is it about national identity which has rendered these claims and sacrifices so terribly plausible? Is this national and cultural identity established so thoroughly that its fixity and foundational moorings cannot be questioned at all? One of the basic premises of our investigation consists in the belief that ‘nations’ are not ‘natural entities’ but rather products of social and cultural constructions in which our identities are implicated in varying degrees.

A number of scholars of nationalism such as Gellner, Anderson and Hobbsbawm have pointed out the contingent and constructed nature of nation and nationalism and by parity of reason,

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22 Still recovering from Napoleon’s defeat of the Prussian army in 1806, German philosopher J. Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) delivered his Addresses to the German Nation in Berlin: “The noble-minded man will be active and effective, and will sacrifice himself for his people. Life merely as such, the mere continuance of changing existence, has in any case never had any value for him; he has wished for it only as a source of what is permanent. But this permanence is promised to him only by the continuous and independent existence of his nation. In order to save his nation he must be ready even to die that it may live, and that he may live in it the only life for which he has ever wished.” Fichte, “Addresses to the German Nation,” as reprinted in William Elliot and Neil McDonald, eds., Western Political Heritage (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949) p. 797. C. f., Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, “Fascism,” Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal (New York: Longman, 1999) 187-215, 191.
the constructions of identity contained within it. Such a perspective stands in contrast with the absolutist perspective which portrays nation and national identity as historical necessity with extreme tendencies. A clear case of such extreme nationalist tendencies can be seen in Nazi ideology's identity constructions of 'Self' and the 'Other' based on Aryan superiority and xenophobic portrayal of the non-Aryan that led to the extermination of millions of innocent people. However, it would be a mistake to consider such ideologies as a thing of past; such ideologies are alive even today, even in countries like India.

2.2 Nation and Identity Constructions
In the discussions about national identity, we need to note two interrelated aspects. The first aspect is related to the organizing principles of the nation; it is related to the very structure of the communities which are integrated and constituted as the nation. The second aspect of the national identity relates to the unique and specific aspects of given communities. In the discursive terrain of national identity these two aspects are often mixed up. As Bhikhu Parekh, a well known political scientist, has pointed out, the confusion in the discussion of national identity centers around the very concept of identity. According to him, in most discussions on national identity, the term identity is used in one of the two senses: “First, it refers to the inner structure and the organizing or constitutive principles of a community; that is, to the way it is constituted and its different parts are integrated to a coherent whole. Secondly, the term national identity is used to refer to what is unique and peculiar, or specific to a community and distinguishes it from others.”

Here, the question pertains to the very basis on which identity is perceived.

Though these two senses are related, they have different orientations and implications; it depends on how we understand and place the thrust. Parekh delineates the meaning and implications of the term national identity in the first sense as follows: “In the first sense of national identity, the intention is to explore a community from within and to elucidate its constitutive characteristics. Whether these characteristics are unique to it and make it different from others is immaterial. Difference is important, but it is ontologically secondary and derivative.”


community from within. To be sure, every community has a unique history, geography, economic and political structure; and its constitutive characteristics would be different from others. As Parekh points out, even if these differences are not so distinct and so pronounced, 'that is not a matter of anxiety. And when they are different, it is not the difference per se but the fact that it springs from the kind of community it is that is important.'

On the other hand, in the second sense of national identity, the relationship is reversed. Here, "difference is made the basis of identity of the community, and the latter's constant concern, if it is not to erode or lose its identity, is to maintain its differences from others at all cost." This basic thrust and obsession with 'difference' and the preoccupation with national identity, according to Parekh, lead to paradoxes and are ultimately self-defeating:

As difference from others constitutes the community's identity, others become its constant frame of reference. It measures itself against them lest it should become like them. It therefore becomes other-directed and preserves its identity at the expense of its autonomy. The second sense of identity also fetishizes difference and discourages inter-communal borrowing. It encourages the community to pay far more attention to how and how much it differs from the others than to whether or not it is true to itself. It also leads it to stress only those aspects of it in which it differs from others and to distort and falsify its way of life.

If the basis and focus of identity becomes the 'difference,' then the emphasis falls on what may be termed as 'exclusivist' approach to one's own community and to that of others. The openness to other communities becomes extremely difficult in this perspective. Here, identity is seen as historically fixed and immutable. Even if we locate Upadhyay's constructions of Hindu identity within the context of anti-colonial nationalism there are elements which tend to conceive it as pre-given within the confines of rigidly conceived concept of community that leaves little room for freedom of choice. Such a view of identity stems, among other things, from a restrictive reading of Indian culture (in the singular) and its past which owes a great deal to the Orientalist 'filter' of interpreting the history of Indian subcontinent.

### 2.3 Aryans as Ontologically Privileged
From the early stages of Indian nationalism there was a marked tendency to correlate the national identity with cultural identity. This tendency can be seen not only in Upadhyay but

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25 Bhikhu Parekh, "Discourses on National Identity," 123.
26 Bhikhu Parekh, "Discourses on National Identity," 123.
27 Bhikhu Parekh, "Discourses on National Identity," 123.
also in the thinking of numerous nationalists such as Vivekananda, Tilak and Aurobindo. On numerous occasions Upadhyay has made a correlation between political life and cultural life. A close reading of his writings would reveal a basic premise: cultural life (which for him, is Hindu cultural ethos) was the source of values for politics; without the former the latter would become debased. Briefly stated, for Upadhyay, national/political life was intrinsically related to Hindu cultural ethos and the creators and custodians of this ethos are the Aryans. Both British and German Orientalists had contributed to popularize such myths in the colonial period.

Indologists of Romantic period had spoken of the pure and pristine Indian past. For Indologists like Max Müller the Vedic communities represented the Indian quest for religious truth and wisdom. Along with the notion of Aryan race also came the idea of Aryan superiority which was utilized by various nations for their own nationalist ends. Max Müller had contributed particularly to the notion of Aryan superiority. Linguistics, anthropology, and biology had combined with the cultural and political achievements of the European powers along with a sense of being world leaders. They were not only conquerors but also, in the words of Max Muller, creators of 'civilization, commerce and religion' with a mission to unite the world. Goodrick-Clarke summarizes the prevailing Aryan Race Theory of the nineteenth century Europe: "They were all Aryans and the Aryans were the superior race, the highest form of humanity."

28 Vivekananda dismisses the idea that there are ethnic groups other than Aryans; for him, whole of India is composed of Aryan race: "There may have been a Dravidian people who vanished from here, and the few who remained lived in forests and other places. It is quite possible that the language may have taken up, but all these are Aryans who came from the North. The whole of India is Aryan, nothing else." Vivekananda, "The Future of India," Selections from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 283.

29 Max Müller equated linguistic communities with racial communities, bordering on scholarly racism. In his essay on Vedas (1853), Max Müller wrote: "The Aryan nations, who pursued a northwesterly direction, stand before us in history as the principal nations of north-western Asia and Europe. They have been the prominent actors in the great drama of history, and have carried to their fullest growth all the elements of active life with which our nature is endowed. They have perfected society and morals; and we learn from their literature and works of art the elements of science, the laws of art, and the principles of philosophy. In continual struggle with each other and with Semitic and Turanian races, these Aryan nations have become the rulers of history, and it seems to be their mission to link all parts of the world together by the chains of civilization, commerce and religion." Max Müller, "The Veda," Chips from a German Workshop, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868) 65.

In this racial theory, the Aryans, the conquerors of India, came to be portrayed as robust, superior and philosophically inclined race. The Aryan model of history was popularized in India by colonial educational system. Indian nationalists had incorporated this Aryan mythography, propounded first by the British and German Orientalists, into their nationalist discursive practices. They had at their disposal a whole lot of textual support, written by Aryans themselves, now made available more easily by prolific Orientalist translations and studies, to backup this claim. In the early Indian nationalist discourses the Aryan came to be seen as ontologically superior to all other races of the subcontinent. The Aryavarta of the romantic Orientalist imagination had been enthusiastically incorporated by nationalists like Upadhyay in their anti-colonial struggle. The imagined national space came to be seen as spatially congruent with Aryavarta or the land of the Aryans, with north India forming its cultural core. In the spatial construction of the imagined nation Aryavarta eventually came to be engendered and identified as 'Bharatmata' in the early nationalist discourse.

In the Orientalist discourse, the non-Aryan ‘Other’ had been consistently portrayed as ontologically inferior to the Aryans, the alleged creators of Indian culture. Implied in some of the portrayals of colonial historians was the intrinsic superiority of the Aryan north and Dravidian South India, which is clearly based on racial differences. In the Aryan model of history adopted by Upadhyay, the binary opposition between the Aryan and non-Aryan ‘Other’ figures prominently in the construction of Indian identity. A corollary to this Aryan/non-Aryan juxtaposition is his consistent portrayal of the decline of Arya-dharma due

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31 Colonial historians W. W. Hunter and Vincent Smith contributed to popularize this myth in history text books in India. For example Hunter wrote in 1881: “At a very early period we catch sight of a nobler race from the north-west, forcing its way in among the primitive peoples of India. This race belonged to the splendid Aryan or Indo-Germanic stock, from which the Brāhman, the Rājput, and the Englishman alike descend.” W. W. Hunter, *A Brief History of the Indian People* (Edinburgh: Morrison & Gibb, 1881) 43.

32 Vincent Smith, colonial historian takes as his point of departure the undisputed dominance of the Aryan north over the rest of India, implying clearly the superiority of Aryan invaders over the dark skinned non-Aryans: “From the Vedic hymns it has been possible to piece together a reasonably coherent picture of the Aryan invaders on their first impact with the black, noseless (flat-nosed) Dasyus who comprised their native opponents and subjects. The archetype of the invaders was their war god, Indra; like him, the Aryan hero was strong, bearded, of mighty appetite, and a great drinker of the divine liquid, soma, a drink of unknown composition but equivalent to the nectar of the Greek world.” Vincent Smith, *The Oxford History of India* (1919; Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 32.

33 According to Vincent Smith the very choice of the British to make the Aryan north India was the key to their imperial success and conversely, the choice of the French to make the Dravidian south was the reason for their failure. Vincent Smith, *The Oxford History of India* (1919; Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 2.
to the inter-mingling of Aryans with non-Aryans of India. Brahmapandhab's anxiety over the need to preserve the purity of the Aryan race through varnasramadharma can be seen in several of his articles; for him the observation of the caste-code is the condition for the possibility of preservation of racial purity. The objective of such 'racial' preservation, for Upadhyay, is related at once to the protection of Aryan culture.

Upadhyay's nationalist consciousness does not remain merely at the level of national identity; it percolates and permeates his notions of Hindu-Catholic identity. In other words, Brahmapandhab's Indian self-defintions also inform his Hindu-Catholicism. As Amartya Sen has pointed out, the nationalist approaches developed in pre-independent 'India have to be understood and judged in terms of the tasks that were then faced, and then have to be reassessed in the light of the problems faced contemporarily.' Given the fact of linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of India, the element of exclusiveness which permeates Upadhyay's notion of national identity stands on questionable grounds.

3. Upadhyay and Hindu Identity
Two contrasting strands of thoughts can be detected in the formation of national identity in the early stages of nationalism. In the first strand of thought, nationalist Hindu leaders like Upadhyay asserted that a common Indian identity could be found in what he (and others) believed as a 'common' culture derived from religion. Nationalists of this ideological persuasion saw Hinduism as a source of interconnection among Indians. The second strand, as exemplified by Upadhyay's one time friend Tagore and the social reformers also saw religion as the basis for commonality. But they emphasized a pluralistic conception of religion and morality. This stream of nationalism tried to discover a shared and historical past and of cultural pluralism as the basis for unity; they fostered a critical openness to the question of identity. Tagore was very critical of making nationalism the end of all; he

36 This critical openness to identity can be seen in the thought of Rabindranath Tagore. He points out, in a lecture (given between 1916 and 1917), that in the past, Asian peoples had thought out the solutions of the life problems 'in seclusion and carried out behind the security of aloofness, where all the dynastic changes and foreign invasions hardly touched them. But now we are overtaken by the outside world, our seclusion is lost for ever. Yet this we must not regret, as a plant should never regret when the obscurity of its seed-time is broken. Now the time has come when we must make the world problem our own problem; we must bring the
pointed out the need to go beyond narrow conceptions of nationalism to more open, shared values of humanity. The first strand of nationalist perspective exemplified by Upadhyay projected identity – especially that of Hindu identity which was equated with national identity – in a narrow and restricted sense.

3.1 Hindu Nationalism as Cultural Nationalism

In delineating his nationalist thought we have already noted the intrinsic connection between nationalism and Hinduism. In the nationalist thought of Upadhyay the cultural core of the emerging national space, though variously named as the Aryan, Indo-Aryan, caste-Hindu, Hindu or even Indian, came to be identified with the Sanskritic, textual traditions of Vedic Brahminism. Can we call Upadhyay’s nationalism “Hindu” nationalism? It would depend on how we understand the meaning of Hindu nationalism. According to Pratap Bhanu Mehta, “first and foremost Hindu nationalism is an attempt to make Hindus self conscious of their identity as Hindus. It seeks to create a Hindu identity that can transcend the internal social, cultural, political and regional distinctions of people classified as Hindus.” The key term here is the notion of Hindu identity. According to Mehta, Hindu nationalism “attempts to make them self conscious of their own history and create a common identity, to mobilize this identity to protect and glorify the claims of Hindus, and most importantly to assert the cultural primacy of Hindus in the territorial identity called India, to define India primarily as the land belonging to Hindus.” If we apply Mehta’s description to Upadhyay’s nationalism, it would, then, indeed appear as Hindu nationalism. However, it is equally important to note the way this Hindu identity is constructed.

The mixture of religion and politics had been part and parcel of anticolonial Indian nationalism at the tail end of the nineteenth century and the early part of twentieth century.

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spirit of civilization into harmony with the history of all nations of the earth; we must not, in foolish pride, still keep ourselves fast within the shell of the seed and the crust of the earth which protected and nourished our ideals; for these, the shell and the crust, were meant to be broken, so that life may spring up in all its vigour and beauty, bringing its offerings to the world in open light.” Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2003) 16-17.

37 Tagore says in the Lecture on ‘Nationalism’: “India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.” Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, 83.


Most nationalists invoked explicitly and implicitly Hindu symbols. Within this admixture it is difficult to detect where politics begins and where religion ends and vice versa. For instance, Bankimchandra popularized the juxtaposition of the mother goddess and mother India in his novel *Anandamath* and more specifically in the song *Vande Mataram*. For Vivekananda Hindu cultural ethos was the condition for the possibility of the nationhood. Tilak rallied the masses around the symbol of Ganesh festival which met with considerable success. Some decades later Gandhi would articulate the inseparability of politics and religion in his struggle against the British Empire. It would be reasonable to suggest that Upadhyay stood within this nationalist tradition which understood politics as inseparable from the religious and cultural ethos of India. For Upadhyay, this Hindu nationalism was both religious and cultural. As we have seen already, for Brahmabandhab Hinduism was at once religious, social, racial and cultural. Thus, he constantly shuttles between cultural, social, racial and religious dimensions of Hinduism. Aloysius points out three significant dimensions of cultural nationalism in the context of India:

The articulation of cultural nationalism revolves around first, the beliefs concerning the distinctness, integrity, uniqueness and superiority of one’s culture and second, the claim that such a culture is the proper and legitimate repository of collective and determinative power. The culture is named and identified, its contours delineated and lineage traced, its rise and fall in history noted and potential threats to it identified. Then this sanctified culture, with its internal power configuration, is projected as the normative model for the present and future of the nation. Finally, the demand is raised that collective power congrue with this ‘national’ culture. Cultural-nationalist articulation is thus a process that sets forth the nation as an ideological-cultural construct.

An important byproduct of Orientalist construction of Hinduism was the juxtaposition of Hindu cultural space and the national space. Three dimensions of cultural nationalist ideology, namely, Vedic Brahminism as the cultural core, a pan-Indian territorial extent, and

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40 One of the characters of Bankim’s novel *Anandamath*, Bhavan, sings *Bande Mataram*. In the novel Bankim clarifies that the ‘mother’ refers to a country, and not to a mortal mother. ‘Bankim puts these words of clarification into Bhavan’s mouth: “We recognize no other mother,” Bhavan said with feeling. “The Motherland is our only mother. Our Motherland is higher than heaven. Mother India is our mother. We have no other mother. We have no father, no brother, no sister, no wife, no children, no home, no earth- all we have is the Mother with sweet springs flowing, fair fruits bestowing, cool with zephyrs blowing, green with corn-crops growing.” Bankim Chandra Chatterji, *Anandamath*, trans. Basanta Koomar Roy, third printing (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2002) 37-42.

the East-West polarity became the cherished tenets of the Indian nationalists. In the nationalist discourse these three dimensions collapsed into one seamless whole giving it a commonsense status. The early nationalists like Upadhyay did share the Orientalist mythographies such as the superiority of the Aryan race, the primacy of Vedism and Sanskrit, and the social precedence of Brahmins which laid the foundation for the articulations of cultural nationalism.

3.2 Indian Identity as Hindu Identity
In the writings of Brahmabandhab there is a definite correlation made between Indian identity and Hindu identity. As we have seen, in Upadhyay’s writings, the intrinsic components of this Hindu identity are the Aryan race and caste system. To what extent Upadhyay’s correlation between national identity and Hindu identity can be justified? Or to put it differently does Hindu identity exhaust Indian identity as Upadhyay seems to imply? Since the ‘Hindu’ component in Upadhyay’s Hindu-Catholicism forms a key aspect of his making Christianity intelligible in India, a close scrutiny of it is required at this point. Upadhyay’s correlation between Hindu identity and Indian Identity needs to be examined from several angles before its reasonableness can be assessed. This examination of identity question is not merely a matter of interpretation of the past as exemplified in Upadhyay; it is a question that is recurrent in contemporary identity politics of India.

An important aspect involved in Upadhyay’s correlation between Indian identity and Hindu identity consists in the assumption that the Hindus are the creators of the supposedly Indian culture. Nationalists who championed a singular Hindu identity projected the view that India’s history is essentially the history of Hindu civilization. A corollary to this projection consisted in the nationalist view that the architects of the core civilizational identity and cultural values were the Aryans. The ultimate correlation made in this view is the equation of ‘Indian culture’ with ‘Hindu culture.’

As far as the early nationalist phase was concerned, a strong Hindu religious element was present in the extremist thought and propaganda from 1905; some of the extremists like

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42 G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, 133-134.
Upadhyay identified nationalism with the revival of Hinduism. They projected Indian culture in terms of ancient classical culture to the exclusion of other phases of history of the subcontinent. Moreover, for these nationalists, the unity of India was basically the unity of Hindus. Within this strand of nationalism, India was projected fundamentally as religious and spiritual. Nationalists like Upadhyay, Bankim, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Tilak tried to provide a Hindu ideological basis to Indian nationalism; they used explicit Hindu symbols and idioms derived mainly from north India in their nationalist discourse.

Upadhyay's nationalist discourse which equates Hindu identity with Indian identity tends to ignore the complex and heterogeneous character of India's cultural past. In the enthusiasm to find a common cultural core, what has been ignored by this nationalist discourse, are the various strands of cultural influences and factors which have shaped Indian history for at least two and a half millennia. In part, such projection of Indian culture (in the singular) as the creation of Hindus owes it origins to the Romantic strand of Orientalism which glorified the 'golden' age of Vedic culture. The selective interpretation of India's past suited the nationalist discourse in an effort to forge cultural unity as the matrix of the emergent national space.

India is the product of a large number of cultural influences. For example, the contribution of Buddhism, in terms of philosophy, morality, higher education, art, and architecture, can hardly be ignored when the cultural past of India is discussed. Buddhism had been a significant catalyst in the cross cultural encounter between ancient India and several Asian countries. Christianity which has been present in India at least for a thousand and six hundred years has contributed significantly in a number of areas such as science, astronomy, linguistics, literature, cartography, medicine, printing, and educational institutions. The contribution of Islam, at least from the tenth century, had a considerable influence in terms of

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43 In this context, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's observation about Hindu revivalism is pertinent: "The movement is vaguely referred to as "Hindu revivalism," which generally meant, despite the existence of various stands and contradictory tendencies, an attempt to define Indian nation primarily in terms of Hindu religious symbols, myths and history." Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004) 234.

44 Bipin Chandra, Communalism in Modern India (Delhi: Vikas, 1979) 141-142.

art, architecture, science, music, literature, and administrative institutions. There is a sizable adivasi population who had been present in India even before Hinduism came into existence. Jainism and Sikhism also have contributed to the cultural heritage of India. There had been cultural, scientific, mercantile exchanges between India and other civilizations such as Greek, Persian, Arab, and Chinese. There had been also Jewish and Parsee communities for several centuries in India. The characterization of India as 'Hindu civilization' tends to 'add some highly deceptive credibility to the extraordinary distortion of history and manipulation of the present realities.' In his depiction of India as 'Hindu' nation and culture Upadhyay seems to have compromised the composite nature and the rich cultural heritage of the subcontinent. The essentialized view which equates Indian identity with Hindu identity can be seen at various levels - the right-wing political discourses, common parlance, and writings about Indian 'culture.'

3.3 Caste Identity as Cultural Core
As we have seen, Brahmabandhab defended the existence of caste system vehemently. One of the consistent arguments to defend caste system by Upadhyay hinged on the insistence that it was the essence of Hinduism, and therefore, the destruction of it would mean the disintegration of the Hindu society. He locates the very cohesion and cultural salience of Hinduism and of India in the varnasramadharma. Brahmabandhab portrayed the caste system as the product of 'Hindu genius' and projected the system as natural and scientific. Within Upadhyay's hermeneutical scheme, the differentiation within the caste structure corresponded to natural qualities or properties and thus, the system itself (with its inequalities) was in complete agreement with the natural order. Thus, for Upadhyay, various components which went into the making of this social order such as hierarchy, hereditary occupation, untouchability and restrictions on commensality were part and parcel of the natural order. To

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48 Nirad Chaudhuri's writings reflect such a essentialized view: "They [the Hindus] are the masters and rulers... They are also the only source of energy for the country considered as a human machine; and it is their desires and aspirations which are keeping it running. No other element counts." He writes further: "... At least, I have no hesitation in saying that if the history of India has taken a certain course in the last fifty years, or for that matter in the last thousand, that is due, above all, to the Hindu character. It has been the most decisive determining influence on the historical process. I feel equally certain that it will remain so and shape the form of everything that is being undertaken for and in the country." Nirad Chaudhuri, The Continent of Circe (London: Catto and Windus, 1965) p. 86. Quoted by Richard Lannoy, "Preface," The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) XVIII.
be sure, in Brahmabandhab’s interpretation the subordination of various castes within the
hierarchy and the inequalities it implied, are seen as something natural and innate. For him,
the Hindu identity and the Indian identity were intrinsically linked to the caste system.
According to his reasoning, if the basis of this social structure is disturbed, the very
foundation of Hinduism and Hindu identity will be destroyed.

Nationalists like Brahmabandhab resisted any challenge to the fundamentals of this social
system which was seen by him as the very core of Hindu identity. It was precisely on this
argument of social cohesion that Upadhyay sought to resist reformist challenge which
interrogated the caste system. In the socio-cultural upheavals of nineteenth century Bengal,
the question of caste was also a political question. A corollary to this resistance to social
reform is the Upadhyay’s perception that the reformist agenda was inspired by western
models and therefore irrelevant to the Indian context. Against the background of what was
perceived as the negative influences permeating the Indian society, the call of social
reformers who challenged the caste system, sounded to Upadhyay like a death knell of the
very foundation of Hindu social fabric.

Without minimizing the importance of Upadhyay’s concerns and anxieties about the Hindu
caste system, we can, however, also examine the implications of his position within the
context of identity. In Upadhyay’s scheme of interpretation, one has hardly any choice over
one’s identity within Hindu social structure. The identity is pre-given, fixed once and for all.
Within this deterministic template, all that can be done is to do one’s duty from one’s pre-
given caste position. Caste structure, which has been described as ‘systems of cumulative
inequality,’ entails unequal power relations and it manifests itself in terms of disabilities for
those who are at the lower rungs of the social strata. Upadhyay, who had been a vehement
critique of colonial oppression of Indians, fails to see the dehumanizing elements of the caste
structure. Given his hermeneutical framework, perhaps, he does not even consider it as
dehumanizing. The same Upadhyay, who sought to re-establish self-respect and dignity for

49 Partha Chatterjee writes: “The more the intelligentsia asked itself what its role was to be in relation to the
crisis that was rapidly overtaking the social world around it, the more political the answers became.” Partha
Chatterjee, “The Political Culture of Calcutta,” The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political
Criticism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998)189.

50 André Béteille, “Race, Caste, and Ethnic Identity,” Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and
pp. 128-149, here, 129.
Indians under colonialism, was also keen in denying dignity and self-respect for the vast majority of people who were at the lower rungs of the social ladder and who were forced to eke out their living doing menial jobs. Indeed, unlike Upadhyay, there had been numerous Hindu social reformers who saw aspects of the same system as degrading and sought to change it. Upadhyay seems to have assumed, like many others, that caste system is innocent of ideology. He seems to have presumed that these social structures and identities are pre-given and therefore are non-negotiable. Such views leave little room for choice in terms of identity especially for those who are at the lower rungs of the social ladder.

3.4 Hindu Tradition and Colonialism

Another aspect involved in Upadhyay's correlation between Indian Identity and Hindu identity pertains to the restrictive reading of Hinduism as a singular, monolithic entity. Colonial administrative measures and mechanism had contributed, inadvertently, to the creation of Hinduism as a monolithic entity. However, it must be noted that this creation was not something done out of a premeditated intent. It was partly due to the Orientalists constructions and partly due to colonial administrative exigencies that Hinduism came to be treated as a 'singular' entity like Christianity and Islam.  

A case in point is the administrative measure in terms of the induction of Hindu Personal Law (HPL) in 1772 based on dharmasastras by Hastings with the active collaboration of the early British Orientalists like Halhed, Wilkins, Colebrooke and William Jones and resulted in the production of The Gentoo Code in 1776. On February 3, 1777, pandits [Brahmans] were appointed as law officers to the Supreme Court of Calcutta with a view of giving vyavasthas

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51 Dirks describes the novelty of this idea brought about by the colonial administration: "It was not just the idea of a majority community that was new but also the use of the single term “Hindu” to designate a population that ranged so widely in belief, practice, identity, and recognition. “Hindu” began as a general designation for the people of a place, but little by little it was affiliated to normative conditions that were oppositional (to Muslims, or Christians), exclusive (of tribals, or untouchables), and confessional (in the sense of a single world religion)." Nicholas B. Dirks, Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003) 255.

or legal opinions. This administrative measure was undertaken by what may be termed as the ‘textualized’ reading and interpretation of Hinduism. However, in the process of introducing HPL into the administrative system, ironically the colonial administrators also contributed to changing some of the basic features of Hindu tradition. Believing that Hindu ‘Dharma’ is equivalent to the Western concept of ‘religion’ these administrators began to fashion Hindu jurisprudence after the English judicial system with its ‘case’ model method. The colonial administrators seem to have made a parallel between the ecclesiastical laws of Britain and the ‘ecclesiastical’ laws of the Brahmans, namely, the dharmasastras. Hastings’ Plan of 1772 provided that matters of (1) inheritance (2) marriage (3) caste, and (4) other religious usage or institutions should be adjudicated according to the provisions of the dharmasastras. Interestingly, Hastings’ reserved topics for the dharmasastras correspond to those that were within the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts in England. Lariviere comments:

It is here that we encounter the well-intentioned misunderstanding. It was the view of these early British — Warren Hastings, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, Henry T. Colebrooke, Sir William Jones — that the dharmasastras dealt with religion and that the expositors of the dharmasastra, the brahmanas, were priests. This had two devastating consequences: the British thought it was possible to restrict the application of the dharmasastra to the above-mentioned areas, and the British judicial authorities mistakenly believed that the dharmasastra was a unitary whole, uniformly...


54 Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Bengali novelist of the nineteenth century writes about the mistaken notion of dharma as Hindu religion: “Search through all the vast literature of India, and you will not, except in modern writings where Hindu has sought obsequiously to translate the phraseology of his conquerors, meet with any mention of such a thing as the Hindu religion. Search through all the vast records of pre-Mohamedan India, nowhere will you meet with even such a word as Hindu, let alone Hindu religion. Nay more. Search through the whole of that record, and nowhere will you meet with such a word as religion. The word Dharma, which is used in the modern vernaculars as its equivalent, was never used in pre-Mohamedan India in the same sense as Religion... For religion [the pre-Mohamedan Hindu] had no name, because he never entertained any conception to which such a name would have been applicable. With other peoples, religion is a part of life; there are things religious, and there are things secular. To the Hindu, his whole life was religion.” Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Bankim Rachanavali (Calcutta: Calcutta Sahitya Samsad, 1969) p. 230. Quoted by Lariviere, “Justice and Panditas: Some Ironies in Contemporary Readings of the Hindu Legal Past,” The Journal of Asian Studies, 758.


applicable to all Hindus everywhere – in the same way that ecclesiastical law was uniformly applicable to the confessors of the creed of the Church of England.  

The introduction of HPL modeled after the British legal system had some significant results. One of the results of the introduction of the HPL was the establishment of legal proceeding according to ‘precedence,’ a typical British juridical practice superimposed on Hindu jurisprudence. As Galanter has pointed out, “regard for the precedent as such was foreign to the Hindu system. Introduction of rule of stare decisis diminished the flexibility of Hindu law by ruling out innovations to meet changes in community sentiment.” Cohn points out the ultimate irony involved in the British efforts in the introduction of Hindu personal law:

Today when one picks up a book on Hindu law, one is confronted with a forest of citations referring to previous judge’s decisions – as in all Anglo-Saxon-derived legal systems – and it is left to the skills of the judges and lawyers, based on their time-honored abilities to find precedent, to make the law. What had started with Warren Hastings and Sir William Jones as a search for the “ancient Indian constitution” ended up with what they had so much wanted to avoid – with English law as the law of India.

Secondly, in their quest to eliminate conflicting regional variations and to achieve uniformity, ‘local customs’, an important ingredient in the traditional Hindu jurisprudence, was eliminated. The colonial administrative measure had a long term effect on the character of Hinduism. By fixing and ‘freezing’ the traditional Hindu dharmasastras which had

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58 Stare decisis denotes the legal principle of determining points in litigation according to precedent. See, Concise Oxford Dictionary.

59 Marc Galanter, Law and Society in Modern India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) 25.

60 Bernard Cohn, “Law and the Colonial State in India,” Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) 75.

61 Galanter delineates some of the British assumptions about law which did not correspond to the ‘ground realities’ which were traditionally operative in India: “The British assumed that there was some body of law somehow comparable to their own, based on authoritative textual materials to be applied by officials according to specified procedures to reach unambiguous results. However, there was no single system in use, but a multiplicity of systems; and within these there was often no fixed authoritative body of law, no set of binding precedents, no single legitimate way of applying or changing the law.” Marc Galanter, Law and Society in Modern India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) 21.

62 Lariviere describes the mechanism by which the dharmasastra operated: “The dharmasastra was indeed the standard by which Hindus conducted their affairs, but the dharmasastra was not simply the texts that the British read with their panditas. Rather, dharmasastra, literally the science of dharma, was a highly flexible and ingenious science in which the standards of orthodoxy and righteousness of a given locale or group could continually be adapted to the needs and desires of the subjects and at the same time continue to be strictly enforced. The mechanism for doing this was the system of adjudication each community used to settle its
immense regional variations, colonial administration also transformed the basic character of traditional Hinduism in the sense that it sought to eliminate immense amount of regional variations of traditional Hindu legal system together with regional customs, which gave an impression of Hinduism as a monolithic entity.

3.5 Hinduism as Monolithic Entity

European travelers, British historians, colonial administrators and evangelicals consistently portrayed Hinduism as a set of superstitions and irrational beliefs. Some of them saw the cause of Hindu degradation in the priest craft and Brahminic hegemony. They saw the irrationality of Hinduism as the very anti-thesis of European rationalism and Enlightenment. Some of the European philosophers and social critics such as Hegel and Marx interpreted India basically as a static society which lacked political cohesion; India's colonial subjugation was the logical consequence of such lack of political unity and cohesion. There was also a view prevalent among the Orientalists, that India, for all its civilizational achievements, was stagnated at the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder.63 'India has no history' was the common complaint of European historians of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Against the background of such collective negative perceptions about Hinduism and India, there was some serious soul searching among the nineteenth century Indian intelligentsia. The response of Indian intelligentsia to such negative perceptions was neither homogeneous nor unified.

The emergence, under Brahminic auspices, of a more singular and unified definition of Hinduism during the colonial period, in part at least, was a self-consciously emulative reaction to the challenges thrown by such negative perception. The emergence of a unified version of Hinduism, in part, was also a response to the challenges thrown by Christianity within the colonial matrix. One of the central features of such a response consisted in the search for an internal principle of unity which could bring together disparate dimensions of Hinduism under a cohesive umbrella. As Romila Thapar has argued, the nationalists of

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63 In spite of his idealized images, for Max Muller, India represented the 'infant' state and Germany stood at the advanced state of civilizational evolution. In his 'Preface' to the translation of Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, Muller writes: "While the Veda we may study the childhood, we may study in Kant's Critique the perfect manhood of the Aryan mind." Max Muller, Trans. "Translator's Preface," *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1881) lxii.
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have forged what she terms as ‘syndicated’ Hinduism. According to this view, the nationalists’ remolding of historical religious pluralism represents a complex yet politically effective assemblage of practices and ideas which sought to shape Indic traditions in the image of Semitic religious traditions. In this sense a ‘Hindu’ identity – as distinct from defining oneself as a Vaishnava, Shaivite or Shakta – is as decisively modern as a regional or national identity.  

The immense internal diversity of Hinduism itself seems to be compromised in the efforts of projecting Hinduism as a singular religious entity. Hinduism had been, and still is, an assemblage of regional variations and historical traditions with diverse ‘centers’ acting as loosely cohesive agencies. There is no one unifying ‘center’ of Hinduism even today. What constitutes Hindu beliefs and practices varies immensely across regional boundaries. As J. Alam points out, we can detect hegemonic trends ‘that seeks to impose monolithic conceptions of nation and culture, all derived from restrictive readings of Hindu religion.’

Understood as a confederation of polymorphic centers, Hinduism reveals an immense diversity of traditions and beliefs, some of which are diametrically opposed to each other. As Bhattacharyya notes, ‘those who are under the notion that India is a land of spirituality know her but partially. The materialist School of thought in India was as vigorous and comprehensive as materialistic philosophy in the modern world.’ For example, the Čārvāka School, also known as ‘Lokāyata’ (popular), denied the existence of any soul or pure consciousness, which is admitted by traditional Indian philosophic systems. This school, which is basically materialist and atheistic in its orientation, also denied the possibility of liberation in any form, the infallible nature of the Vedas and the doctrine of karma and

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65 These ‘centers’ could be either the sacred cities such as Banaras, Prayag, and Gaya or centers of learning according to the schools or traditions such as Sankara, Madhva, Ramanuja, and Vallabha. Bernard Cohn, “Networks and Centers in the Integration of Indian Civilization,” An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004) 78-87.
rebirth. As Bhattacharya points out, ‘the voice of the Carvaka was the voice of revolt – of protest against the age-long superstitions and prejudices that had denied freedom of thought.’ The early Samkhya system of philosophy, especially that of the founder of its system, Kapila, is included in the Indian Atheistic schools of thought.

To be fair to Upadhyay, we need to accept that he acknowledges the polymorphic character of Hindu thought. To be sure, Brahmabandhab recognizes the diverse aspects of Hinduism, yet when it comes to the question of Hinduism as a structural entity, he tends to see it in terms of Vedic Brahmanism. Indeed he admits that there is no case for unity of Hinduism in terms of beliefs. But he posits Hindu unity in terms of social and cultural practices within the framework of varnasramadharma. After 1898, the embodiment of true Hinduism, for Upadhyay was the Advaitavada of Sankaracharya. Indeed, for Upadhyay it is the Brahmins who are at the apex of authentic Hinduism based on Vedic tradition.

Indeed, Upadhyay has the perfect freedom to claim that Advaitavada of Sankara is the truest form of Hinduism, that the Brahmanic leadership is essential for the unity of India and Indian identity. However, such claims and projections of what constitutes ‘true’ or ‘perfect’ form of Hinduism has an extremely narrow focus and such assertions cannot go uncontested. For example, it is hardly realistic to expect the adherents of Madhva or Vallabha or Ramanuja to accept the claim of the inherent superiority of Sankara’s monism. Secondly, Upadhyay’s claim as to what constitutes real Hinduism marginalizes a vast majority of people who belong to non-Vedic and non-Brahmanic traditions. In Upadhyay’s scheme of interpretation, the popular religiosity would be seen as an aberration, which has practically nothing to do with classical Hinduism.

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4. Upadhyay and Christian Identity

The questions that guide us may be formulated as follows: to what extent is Upadhyay’s vision of Hindu-Catholic synthesis reasonable from a Christian perspective? To what extent is it compatible with Catholic principles? We shall focus on three aspects of Hindu-Catholic identity: (1) the epistemic domain of Hindu-Catholicism (2) the social vision embedded in Upadhyay’s Hindu-Catholicism and (3) Catholicism and the quest for inculturation.

4.1 Hindu-Catholicism: Epistemic Domain

An attempt such as Upadhyay’s Hindu-Christian synthesis demands an inquiry into the epistemic basis of the synthesis. For instance, he claimed that Veda and Vedanta can provide Christianity in India the foundational categories by which Catholic truths could be rendered comprehensible. Such claim demands an inquiry into the noetic economy of classical Hinduism, which for Upadhyay was the source of providing categories for Indian Catholicism. Here, noetic economy denotes the structures and methods of knowledge generation, namely, the corpus of texts, configurations of accessibility to those texts, schemes of hermeneutics, and transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. In other words, noetic economy refers to the dynamics involved in the production, maintenance and transmission of knowledge in a given culture. How does the noetic economy fare in Upadhyay’s Hindu-Catholic identity synthesis? What are the implications of Upadhyay’s interpretation of Hindu social structure for his Hindu-Catholicism in terms of noetic economy?

Traditional Hinduism, which has a considerably large corpus of sacred literature, recognizes two fundamental scriptural categories of greater and lesser sanctity, namely, *Sruti* and *Smriti*. *Sruti*, or ‘what is heard’ comprises the *Vedas* itself, and this is considered to be eternal, the eternal ‘word’ heard by the *Rishis* or sages of immemorial antiquity. Classical Hinduism considers *Sruti* as the only source of true and perfect knowledge. *Smriti*, or ‘what is remembered’ on the other hand, does not rank with *Sruti* as eternal truth. However, what exactly ranks as Smriti has never been defined with the same vigour as in the case of *Sruti*. Generally, *Smriti*, is understood to comprise the *Sutras* (aphorisms, usually philosophic), the Law Books (books on dharma) the *Puranas* and the two epics, *Mahabharata* and *Mahabharata* and

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71 The Vedas are historically divided into three strata: the *Samhitas* or collections of hymns and formulas, the *Brahmanas* or sacrificial texts, and the *Aranyakas* or ‘forest treatises’ which culminate in the *Upanishads*, esoteric treatises which seek to interiorize the symbolism of the sacred ritual. See, R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 9.
The religious noetic economy of classical Hinduism functions within this basic scriptural framework. The sacrificial domain of classical Hinduism as exemplified in yajna is also intrinsically connected to the noetic economy.

Now let us have a closer look at the accessibility to this noetic economy outlined above. The accessibility to the noetic economy and the ritual domain is a highly regulated matter in classical Hinduism. And this is regulated, among other things, by caste identity which implies purity-impurity classifications. Basically, out of the four, the three castes have access to the traditional noetic economy, including the yajna; the fourth caste, namely, the Sudras is occluded from this domain. Various schools of Vedic interpretation ‘concurred on the central fact of the social exclusion of the sūdras from the crucial vedic performances, whether conceived in terms of knowledge or action.73 Thus, the Sudras, whose main duty is seen as serving the other three castes, are denied access to both the ritual and knowledge domain in classical Hindu system. Professor Daya Krishna’s observation on the effects of such exclusion is pertinent here:

The varna-centric theory of society as derived from the Vedas and its construal in such a way as to make it totally and exclusively yajña-centric and deprive the sudras the right to them, gave a permanent disabling twist to Indian thought about man and society which myriad attempts at rectification by outstanding personalities could hardly succeed in healing, then or later.74

Thus, there is no ‘open access’ to spiritual truths; it is highly regulated. Often this exclusion to Sruti texts is made to appear less serious by appealing to the view that the Sudras have access to truth through the Itihasa and the Puranas or texts dealing with history and mythology.75 However, this does not solve the problem of the accessibility to the spiritual truths of the Vedas. It is not entirely clear, for example, ‘how yajna, which is supposed to be

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73 Daya Krishna points out two such interpretations: “Even the ‘knowledge-centric’ thought of the Upanishads failed to include the sūdras as, in spite of his Brahman-centric interpretation of the texts, Bādarāyana, as much as Jaimini, stuck to the view that according to Sruti itself, the sūdras could not be allowed access to it.” Daya Krishna, *The Problematic and the Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society and Polity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996) 14.


75 However, ‘the Itihāsa or the Purāṇas, were not exclusively meant for those varnas alone which were denied access to the Sruti. Rather, people of all varnas had access to them and, over time, they became as, or even more, popular amongst the three varnas for whom the so-called Sruti was exclusively meant.’ Daya Krishna, *The Problematic and the Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society and Polity*, 18.
the heart of the Veda, according to Jaimini, could have been made accessible to the sudras through the *Iitihasa* and the *Purānas*, as is normally alleged by apologists of the orthodox Vedic tradition. Open access to the spiritual truth has other difficulties as well, as Daya Krishna points out:

> It is one of the central contentions of Bādarāyana, as well as Samkara ... that the knowledge of Brahma cannot be had independently of the *Sruti*, that is, the *Upanishads*, and especially of the three *mahāvākyas* contained in them. Now, if sudras are denied access to the *Sruti*, according to the *Sruti* itself, and if the knowledge of the Brahma can be had only through the *Sruti*, then it is obvious that the sudras can, in principle, never gain knowledge of the Brahma, which alone is true knowledge, according to them. Recourse to the *Iitihasas* and *Purānas* is of no help whatsoever, as nothing but the *Sruti*, that is the *Upanishads* in this case, can provide this knowledge.

The Sudras are positively forbidden to learn the Veda, which alone is the repository of true knowledge. *Manusmriti* has detailed instructions to avoid reading and learning Vedas in the presence of Sudras. Against this background Daya Krishna summarizes the traditional position regarding the noetic economy as follows:

> This is the hard core orthodox position on the subject, though it was continuously suggested that the *Iitihasa* and *Purānas* were meant for all those who could not grasp the subtle truths of the *Upanishads* meant for the *buddhi* which was ratiocinative, abstract and intuitive at the same time, but there is little point in saying that the truth of the *Upanishads* was accessible to the sudras through the *Iitihasa* and *Purānas*, as it was assumed that the sudras congenitally did not possess that kind of *buddhi* or conversely, that anyone who found the *Upanishadic* truth more easily accessible through them, was a sudra.

On the one hand, Upadhyay uses *Upanishad* based concepts like *Sat-cit-ananda* in order to make Christian truths intelligible in the Indian context. On the other hand, he hardly touches the problems contained in the access to the spiritual truths in his writings. Some crucial questions remain unanswered here: first, these Christian truths are made intelligible for whom? Suppose, his efforts are aimed in making Christian truths intelligible to Christians in India, given the traditional closure of Hindu noetic economy, how many Christians can have access to it? Secondly, given the non-accessibility of the ‘spiritual truths’ to the vast number

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of people, how many can understand the classical Hindu concepts and categories used to make Christian truths intelligible? Further, in India, Christians who can understand Sanskrit, the principle medium in which these spiritual truths are embodied, may be extremely limited. According to the 1991 census on language, less than 50,000 people in India consider Sanskrit as their mother-tongue. If we calculate the percentage of Sanskrit speaking population in relation to one billion Indians, it would work out around 0.005%.

Thirdly, is Upadhyay justified in using those categories which are meant only for some select groups, for those excluded from the Hindu noetic economy?

The question of identity is deeply embedded in the noetic economy of classical Hinduism we have delineated above. As social scientist Lancy Lobo points out, "it is not, in general, the Sanskritized Hindus that have responded to the gospel message in India but the non-Sanskritized lower castes and tribals." From the perspective of an anthropologically informed theology, it seems legitimate to ask whether the construction of Indian Christian theology based on classical Indian symbols and categories, as suggested by Upadhyay, is the best way to make the Christian message relevant when the vast majority of Christians in India are from non-Sanskritic, non-classical and subaltern groups.

4.2 Hindu-Catholicism: Social Domain

A second aspect which needs to be evaluated about Upadhyay’s Hindu-Catholic identity is the social vision contained in it. Every religion is organized around certain basic principles and values which guide the life of its adherents. In Catholic tradition three interconnected basic values serve as the foundation of Christian living: (1) Sacredness of life, (2) dignity of human person, and (3) human interconnectedness. It is reasonable to suggest that these basic values ground all others. These principles are derived from the Christian scriptures and the teachings of the Catholic Church. In order to assess the viability of Upadhyay’s ideal of

79 In 1991, more than 90 per cent of the 49,733, who returned Sanskrit as their mother tongue, were from U. P. The rest of those whose mother tongue was Sanskrit were spread over Bihar (802 persons), Karnataka (695), MP (650), Delhi (587), Haryana (575), Rajasthan (433), Maharashtra (277), AP (199), Tamil Nadu (169) and Himachal Pradesh (167). In the remaining states and union territories, the number of those who considered Sanskrit as their mother tongue was less than 100, the lowest being one each in Tripura and Nagaland. Census of India, 1991. C.f., Bhupendra Yadav, “Decline of Sanskrit,” *EPW*, Vol. XL, no. 53 (December 31, 2005) pp. 5537-5539, here, p. 5537 and p. 5539.


Hindu-Christian identity – especially his quest for an integration of the social structure of India into the Christian way of life – we need to juxtapose it with some of the basic Catholic social principles.

In the first place, the Christian view of life, which is seen as sacred, is based on the belief that life is fundamentally a gift from God and therefore, it has intrinsic worth. In the Christian tradition God is seen as the very source of life. Within this framework, the relationship with God demands that the life of human beings be considered sacred and inviolable; this is reflected in the axiom, ‘Thou shall not kill’ (Ex 20: 13). The inviolability and integrity of human life finds also a positive command: ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

Catholic tradition believes that we are stewards of our life, and are accountable to God for the life that has been given to us. This stewardship is related not merely to human life, but to the entire created order. Since life is seen as having an intrinsic value, promotion of life (understood in a comprehensive way) becomes a moral imperative for a Catholic.

Secondly, the value of dignity of the individual stems from the Christian belief that life has intrinsic worth because we are created in the image and likeness of God. Respect and dignity for human life flow from this principle. Moreover, the dignity of the individual is based also on the fact that we are called into a relationship with God, the giver of life. Moreover, the social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person, since the order of things is to be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around. Thus, it is imperative ‘to consider every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.’

Christians have a responsibility to respond to situations which tend to compromise the basic dignity of human persons. These situations include social structures, aspects of cultures,

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82 Lev 19: 18; Mt 22: 37-40.
83 However, it needs to be noted here that life is an absolute good to be preserved at all costs. For example, we have a right to defend ourselves when attacked; there is the principle of 'just war' in which some may lose life. In Catholic medical ethics, the principle of 'proportionality' is used when it comes to the preservation of life through costly medical interventions. See, Hazel Markwell, “End-of-Life: a Catholic View,” The Lancet, Vol. 366 (September 24, 2005) pp. 1132-1135.
84 Pastoral Constitution GS #26, The Documents of Vatican II, ed., Walter Abbot, (n.p: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966). This principle can be seen in the famous axiom of Jesus, ‘Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’ (Mt 2: 27).
human right violations, discrimination based on gender, race and religion, traditions and values, which may contribute in varying degrees to the dehumanizing of individuals and groups.

Thirdly, the value of interconnectedness stems from the Christian belief that we are created by God and we become what we are destined to be by relating to one another. As social beings connected to one another in society, we also share a responsibility for each other. This value also invites Christians to seek the common good, not only for Christians, but for all. Indeed, the belief in the value of common good calls us to promote a just social order. This just order implies that we remain true to the values of solidarity, in which we have a responsibility to respond to others in need, especially the poor and the marginalized. The call to solidarity is a call to affirm in one’s life the interdependence and unity of humankind; within this web of interconnectedness, what happens to one happens to all. As a response to human interdependence, solidarity is a moral virtue which enhances the common good and affirms the intrinsic value of all persons. Human solidarity entails a double dimension: it implies an affirmation of human community and it also implies an affirmation of those people who have been historically excluded from the human community. Solidarity is a response both to other persons and to God who is the creator. Thus, to exclude others from full participation in society is not only to commit an injustice against fellow humans, but also entails transgression against God.

These Catholic social principles are diametrically opposed to Upadhyay’s notion of social identity which is firmly entrenched in his Hindu-Catholicism. Brahmabandhab’s social vision

86 Lonergan describes this principle: “The ideal basis of society is community, and the community may take its stand on a moral, a religious, or a Christian principle. The moral principle is that men individually are responsible for what they make of themselves, but collectively they are responsible for the world in which they live.” Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (London; Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 360.

87 The common good is at the same time what is termed as the ‘good of order.’ Lonergan clarifies the meaning of common good: “My dinner today is for me an instance of the particular good. But dinner every day for all members of the group that earn it is part of the good of order. Again, my education was for me a particular good. But education for everyone that wants it is another part of the good of order.” B. Lonergan, Method in Theology 49.


89 In this context, it is important to note that Jesus identified with the powerless and the ‘least ones’ in society (Mt 25: 31-46). Roberto Goizueta, “Solidarity,” in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, ed. Michael Downey (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2003) pp. 906-907, here, 906.

is rooted in hierarchically arranged system of *Varnasramadharma* with its focus on social exclusion. Upadhyay's social vision sought deliberately to exclude those who are at the lower rungs of society. Upadhyay’s social vision stands in stark contrast to the principle of solidarity enshrined in Christian scriptures and Tradition. In contrast to Brahmabandhab several Indian reformers had engaged in a critique of caste system and the inequalities perpetrated by this structure. In the second half of the nineteenth century some of the Christian leaders had opined that caste and Christianity cannot go together. Upadhyay seemed to have assumed that the hierarchically arranged caste structure with its social exclusion is completely innocent of power relations and ideological underpinnings.

### 4.3 Hindu-Catholicism: Cultural Domain

Against the backdrop of growing anticolonial nationalism, Upadhyay saw the very nature of Catholicism and that of theology as intrinsically related to the question of cultural identity. However, it must be noted that for Upadhyay, given his distinctions between supernatural religion and natural religion and Samaj dharma and Sadhan dharma, the Catholic identity in itself is vacuous since it is required to take the identity of Hindu cultural ethos. Here, Upadhyay’s assumption consists in the belief that ‘Catholicism’ is something of an autonomous and detached entity, a supernatural truth and revelation which could be attached to a given socio-cultural tradition. This assumption of the existence of a body of ‘truths’ of Christianity is similar to the notions of ‘kernel’ and ‘husk’ imagery propounded by the Protestant theologian von Harnack in his book *What is Christianity?* (1900). According to Harnack, the essence or the ‘kernel,’ can be separated from the ‘husk’ or later accretions which are extraneous to the essence of Christianity. We can ask whether such assumptions stand on reasonable grounds in the context of Catholicism. There are some important issues at stake here. According to Gregory Baum, the ecclesiastical literature including Vatican documents,

Presuppose without any investigation that Catholicism is an ensemble of religious truths and ritual practices that can become incarnate in any culture whatever. It is one thing to say that the gospel or the proclamation of Jesus Christ can be communicated

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91 In 1905 Upadhyay published an appeal for a National College. He outlines one of the features of the college as follows: "Boys of low castes, and of families who have broken away from the pale of caste, were to be rigidly excluded." Quoted by Animananda, *Swami Upadhyay Brahmabandhav: A Story of His life*, Part-I, 33.

to any culture, live in it, transform it and achieve in a new and rich expression, it is quite another to say the same thing of Catholicism."^93

As Baum points out the question here is not whether the gospel can find authentic expression in the world’s diverse cultures but whether Catholicism is capable of such incarnations.^94 As Baum points out, the basic difficulty consists in the very nature of Catholicism itself. He argues that Catholicism represents a ‘religious culture’:

Catholicism is a particular embodiment of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Catholicism is a religious culture. It is flexible, it exists in a variety of countries representing different cultures, it has acquired slightly different faces in various parts of the world. Still, the self-organization of Catholicism, the concepts, ideals and practices of governance, constitute an ecclesiastical culture. This culture is not taken from the world in which the New Testament was written; it is derived, rather, from the Catholic Church’s experience in subsequent centuries, from the needs of local and regional churches, the concern for the universal Church and the organizational forms of existing in society at large.^95

From the perspective of sociology and cultural anthropology a culture is seen as an ensemble of customs, laws, values, and rituals that define a community’s collective identity and determine the interaction of the members among themselves. From this perspective, it would appear that Catholicism, with its structures, rituals, laws, and inherited traditions, constitutes itself a culture. Baum asks: “If Catholicism itself is a culture, how can it be ‘inculturated’ in the diverse cultural traditions of the world?”^96 Baum makes this remark: “Discussing possible inculturations of Catholicism, it is therefore necessary to examine to what extent Catholicism itself is a culture. Perhaps, ‘inculturation’ is an ideal that has little foundation in reality.”^97 If Catholicism has made little headway in terms of inculturation in India, then perhaps Baum’s observations about the very nature of Catholicism and its implications for making it intelligible in the subcontinent are important.

Conclusion
The assessment of Upadhyay’s notion of Hindu-Catholicism may be summarized as follows. Firstly, Upadhyay’s interpretation of national identity is heavily embedded within the

templates of Orientalist interpretation of India and its past. Though critical of the Orientalists Brahmabandhab utilizes their hermeneutics, albeit inadvertently, when it comes to the interpretation of the Indian past. One of the key ingredients of this interpretation, which had been part and parcel of the Romantic version of Orientalism, consists in the portrayal of Aryans as the creators of Indian cultural matrix. A corollary of this hermeneutical scheme, which is consistently present in the writings of Upadhyay, had been the depiction of the pristine Vedic past as the ‘golden’ age of India and the caste miscegenation as one of the main reasons for the decay of contemporary India. Thus, Brahmabandhab, who had been obsessed with racial purity, accords the ontological privilege to the culture-creating Aryans in the emerging national space. In Upadhyay’s scheme, the assorted varieties of non-Aryan groups such as the depressed classes, the tribals, the Dravidians and those who are outside the caste system, stay at the lower rungs of the national space. This hegemonic configuration of identity envisaged and insisted upon by Upadhyay distorts the very basic nature of the pluralistic identify of the subcontinent. He seems quite oblivious to the fact that various religions, traditions and cultures have contributed to make India what it is. To accord the privilege to one specific racial group over others as the creators of India’s ‘culture’ is not only quite a mistaken notion, but also a historically distorted one.

Secondly, Upadhyay’s notion of Hindu Identity, which squarely places the cultural heritage of India as Hindu heritage, tends to ignore the multiple cultural reality of the subcontinent. The centrality accorded to the caste structure and varnasramadharma by him has serious implications for the way the very nation is imagined. At one level, he posits a unity even as the internal diversity of Hinduism is erased. Moreover, his projection of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara as the truest form of Hinduism may not be acceptable to a significant number of Hindus themselves who follow the path of Madhva, Vallabha and Ramanuja. Given the fact of historical rivalries between various Vedantic schools, the alleged superiority of Advaita over other systems of Indian philosophy posited by Brahmabandhab will not go uncontested, to say the least. Moreover, Upadhyay’s highly restrictive reading of Hinduism leaves out the popular Hinduism of millions of Indians which has hardly anything to do with classical Hinduism.

Thirdly, the ‘Catholic’ component in Upadhyay’s Hindu-Christian synthesis suffers from some serious limitations. To begin with, the epistemic basis of his Hindu-Catholic synthesis
runs into formidable problems due to the restrictions imposed by the classical Hindu noetic economy over large sections of Indians regarding the access to the 'spiritual truths.' Given the fact that a vast majority of those who have responded to Christianity cannot have an access to the noetic economy of Hinduism by default, the viability of Upadhyay's project of making Christian message intelligible in India by using classical categories poses serious questions. The closure of the noetic economy apart, since those who can understand Sanskrit and classical philosophical categories form a miniscule minority in India, using such categories to embody Christian truths, instead of enlightening, might most probably obscure them. Further, what has been seriously compromised in Upadhyay's vision of Hindu-Catholicism is the very nature of 'Catholicity' understood in terms of 'inclusiveness.' The exclusive, segmented, stratified and closed social structure which he envisions goes against the inclusive nature of Catholicism. Such exclusive and stratified social order compromises the sanctity of life, the common good and human dignity from a Christian perspective. Moreover, the cultural assumptions of Upadhyay which project Catholicism as a detached body of universal truths that can be attached to any culture seem to stand on questionable grounds.

The interface between culture, identity and theological discourse in Upadhyay's writings stand intrinsically related to one another. It seems reasonable to suggest that Upadhyay's theological discourse is determined by a prior horizon, namely, his interpretation of culture. This prior horizon of cultural matrix also influences in a significant way how he understands and interprets identity. As we have seen in previous chapters, a number of interlocked dimensions such as racial configurations, history, and caste play a crucial role in his interpretation of identity. Upadhyay's theology stems from the interpretation of identity which is deeply implicated in the classical cultural ethos of India. The concluding chapter focuses on the limitations of classical approach to culture and theology.