Chapter 2
Desai's Marxist Sociology

A.R. Desai imbibed Marxism in his formative years when he observed minutely the development of anti-imperialist national liberation struggle on the one hand, and diverse currents of radical movements of the working masses, on the other. Attaining intellectual maturity he seriously engaged in applying Marxist sociological framework for the study of his own society passing through a period of great transition. Obviously, the most important subject of his theoretical exercise was origin and development of nationalism in India. The distinctive contribution made by Desai in this field can only be assessed in the context of diverse nationalist discourses prevailing both before and after independence. These actually provide the intellectual background of Desai’s Marxist sociology of nationalism.

Desai begins with the issue of nationalism—that process which, on the one hand, was a negative fall-out of colonialism from the perception of the colonialist. On the other hand, it was a positive process as it mobilised the ‘people’ into an opposition movement against the colonial state and ushered in a qualitative transformation from the contemporary stage of civilisation. In the following sections I have tried to elaborate the concept of nationalism, various discourses on it and Desai’s understanding of the same.

Nationalism as an ideology as well as a social movement has been a predominant process for the formation of the modern world. Nationalism, like many other concepts in social science, is a broad one and denotes several distinct issues. In the first place, it may be a political doctrine or ideology or a set of political principles espoused by individuals and movements. Ernest Gellner (1986:1) subscribes to this view because in his opinion, “Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be
congruent. Nationalism as a sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation by the principle, or the feeling of dissatisfaction aroused by its fulfillment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind.”

Secondly, it may denote “a socio-political movement for state formation or any anti-imperialist movement, or to the nation-building activities or mobilization of a government or class” (Aloysius 1997:10). Thus, both as ideology and movement the concept can be used either in speaking of a state, a group of ethnic communities or a single ethnic community.

Third, according to E. Kedourie, T.H.C. Hayes, etc., the doctrine or ideology of nationalism is at par with liberalism and its “different aspects, its diffusion over the globe, its progressive or regressive impact on world politics, international relations etc.” are its important elements (ibid, 8).

Fourth, in the opinion of Hans Kohn, H.Seton-Watson, etc., nationalism can be seen as “the movement of power between political units or states as...primarily the power politics of state-formation” (ibid). Here Aloysius (1997) is of the opinion that the connection between nationalism and nation-state was more specifically with the territorial component than with nation as a community. Hans Kohn (1967: 3-4) observes, “...with the political and cultural awakening of the masses, in the course of the nineteenth century...nationalism soon turned into the desire for the formation of a nation-state.”

As an ideology, nationalism has no universally accepted definition due to the presence of many variants. The situation is more complex as “nationalism has no clear founding theorist, no classical text which others can refer to—it is an idea...with several elements attached to it” (Baylis and Smith 2001: 443). Nationalism as a normative principle claims that nations do exist, they should coincide with political communities and they should be self-ruling.

Nationalism as an idea is an offspring of the Enlightenment tradition and is particularly associated with the principle of self-determination of communities. To find its theoretical background, according to Baylis and Smith
(ibid), one can look backwards to Rousseau, who laid the foundations of modern ideas of democracy and legitimacy of majority rule, and J.S. Mill, who stressed the desirability of representative government as a form of political system. Representative government involves the principle of individual self-determination from which follows the idea of self-determination of nations. Moreover, the French revolution of 1789 gave to the world the concept of 'nation'; namely, the idea of a common, shared, equal geo-political situation arising out of the unity of the people. Finally, it meant a community based more on history, tradition and culture, followed by political identity.

Hence, nations are presumed to have certain objective characteristics like language, race, religion, territory and history which either singly or in combination distinguish them from other nations. Protection and promotion of these elements, in competition and conflict with other nations, becomes nationalism. Nations, on the other hand, are also considered to be collectivities based on certain subjective factors like consciousness of a similar identity, commonality of interests and the will to be a nation. Here political assertion and actualisation of such consciousness or will by the people becomes nationalism. Thus, according to Hans Kohn (Bottomore 1994: 99), “nationalism is inconceivable without the ideas of popular sovereignty preceding—without a complete revision of the position of rulers and ruled, of classes and caste.” Kohn (1955:10) continues that nationalism is characterised by a dominant role of the rising masses.

Nationalism is also seen as a project of modernisation. According to Rupert Emerson (1970: 203) in Europe, as well as in Asia and Africa, nationalism represents a drive towards modernisation, thus constituting a break with the past, rather than its preservation and restoration. Karl Mannheim (1971:44) is of the opinion that, in its assertion of the right to determine political destiny autonomously, it draws new groups and classes into the political arena, and integrates and politicises them. Says Saila Kumar Ghosh (2008: 35),
nationalism, hence, has a potential for assimilation, mobilisation aggregation and participation which cuts through social barriers of family, kinship, religion, caste, race and class; breaks down parochial traditions; replaces old patrimonial and religious sanctions; suppresses the intermediate authorities; and finally, binds the people with the government in a new system of representation.

The Marxist scholars have tried to approach the issue of nationalism from a 'class' standpoint and emphasised the connection between the rise of the bourgeoisie and the emergence of the nation-state. Marxist scholars like Otto Bauer and Karl Renner (ibid: 110), "saw nationalism as a bourgeois movement, but also as a danger to the working class movement, which might become tainted by nationalist tendencies." Bauer is further of the opinion (Bottomore & Goode 1978:106-07) that modern capitalism gradually begins to distinguish the lower classes including the labouring classes in each nation more sharply from each other as these classes too gain access to education, cultural life and language of the nation. But only socialist society will be able to distinguish whole peoples from each other by the diversity of national education and civilisation, in the same way as capitalism distinguishes between educated classes of different nations at present. Furthermore, inspite of the existence of narrower communities within the socialist nations, there will be no autonomous cultural communities because "every local community, as a result of cultural intercourse, and the exchange of ideas," will be unified within the whole national culture (ibid: 107). From here Bauer (ibid) gives a comprehensive definition of the nation: "The nation is the totality of men bound together through a common destiny into a community of character" (Italics in original). For Lenin (1977), nationalism involved the political separation of nations from alien bodies and formation of independent national states, the right to exist as a separate state. He spoke (ibid: 572) of two stages of nationalism, the beginning of which in the West was the period of the collapse of feudalism and absolutism, the period of the formation
of the bourgeois-democratic society and state, when the national movements for
the first time became mass movements..."

The second stage occurs in the period of fully formed capitalist states and
is distinguished by the absence of mass bourgeois-democratic movements on the
one hand, and antagonism between internationally united capital and
international working class movement, on the other. "The
bourgeoisie...naturally assumes the leadership at the start of every national
movement...what every bourgeoisie is out for in the national question is either
privileges or exceptional advantages for it" (ibid: 579). For the proletariat,
nationalism implies "the negative demand for recognition of the right to self-
determination, without giving guarantees to any nation, and without
undertaking to give anything at the expense of another nation" (ibid: 580). In this
context Hobsbawn's (Nossiter et al.1972: 386) criticism against Marxism can be
mentioned. In his opinion, Marxism, while correctly recognising nationalism as
a phenomenon arising in the bourgeois epoch, failed to consider the fact that it
is not confined to that period in history only. "In a similar vein, Miliband points
out that the urge for nation-state has an exceptional appeal to the various
elements of the national bourgeoisie of subject nations" (1977:101-02; Ghosh
2008: 88). Nationalism has been embraced by any class or group—ethnic,
religious or linguistic— aspiring to independent statehood, in both old as well as
new nations.

For the proletariat, the national demands are subordinated to the
interests of the class struggle and so Marxism places foremost emphasis upon
the alliance of the proletarians of all nations and unity of proletarian struggle.
Nationalism is the struggle against oppression and fights for democracy.
Bourgeois nationalism is democratic because it is directed against feudal
oppression; yet, this nationalism also—has a tendency towards national
exclusiveness where bourgeoisie as a class oppresses other classes. Thus,
proletarian nationalism can find its expression only in class struggle for
socialism. Stalin (1952: 31) viewed nationalism or the 'national question' as specific to each class. In his opinion (ibid), "...in different periods the 'national question' serves different interests and assumes different shades, according to which class raises it, and when." Furthermore, taken by themselves the national interests or national demands are of no particular value—they are important only as far as they stimulate the development of consciousness of particular classes. Consequently, the national emancipation movements are conditioned by the specific level of class consciousness among various classes at a given time.

B.R. Ambedkar defined nationalism as a social feeling: "a feeling of a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin. This national feeling is a double edged feeling....It is a feeling of 'consciousness of kind' which on the one hand binds together those who have it, so strongly that it overrides all differences arising out of economic conflicts or social gradations and, on the other, severs them from those who are not of their kind. It is a longing not to belong to any other group. This is the essence of what is called a nationality and national feeling" (Rodrigues 2002: 461).

One can say after Aloysius (1997:127) that the substantial issue is that modern nationalism in all societies is internal to their own specific form of development. These are to be traced to their individual histories in order to grasp what finally determined the nature and outcome of the nationalist struggles as well as to predict their future course. The form, idiom and style may have been borrowed but they are borrowed primarily to express and resolve the historical dialectic of each society. It must be remembered that the determinative power of the imported ideological forms and styles must be considered in the context of the culture concerned which has had a long and continuous history.

Indian nationalism which emerged and developed in a colonial environment before the end of nineteenth century must be judged from this
viewpoint. In the opinion of Bipan Chandra (1986: 210), “Colonial India has to be studied as a nation in the making both as an objective process and as the subjective cognition of this process...the national movement was the process through which the Indian people were formed into a nation and a people...it was the existence of a common oppression by a common enemy and the struggle against it which provided important bonds uniting the Indian people...the nation was not a datum prior to the nationalist movement. A nation is a process of becoming and national movement is a process through which the people or a population of a colony is formed into a nation or a people and through which they acquire a vision of their society as a nation and of themselves being a people or a nation.”

Several factors were responsible for the lack of nationalist feelings in the subcontinent at the commencement of British rule. For instance, a parochial spirit was prevalent among different communities, maybe due to various historical traditions. Again, the problem of communication created no less a barrier—there was no common language which could be used and understood by all. Furthermore, the whole country was divided into numerous self-contained socio-economic units, almost mutually exclusive in character, and the conception of a united India and being an Indian was yet to materialise. True nationalism is based on patriotism and love of liberty in general. These ideas were developed in India by the impact of western education and culture. As Balgangadhar Tilak realised as early as in 1885 that, “Patriotism is not our national quality, it is the product of the influences to which we have been subjected after the introduction of British rule” (Majumder 1971,V.1: 301).

The progress of British rule in India, thus, saw the birth and development of nationalist thought in this country. Among the factors contributing to it an important place must be given to the growing knowledge and awareness of the glory and greatness of our country during the ancient period. Another factor that stimulated the development of nationalism in India
was the strong current of nationalist feelings that passed over Europe since the end of the eighteenth century. Again, according to R.C. Majumder, "The most important single factor that accounts for this great transformation is the impact of the West through the introduction of English education. It broke the barrier which had hitherto effectively shut India from the outside world and opened the floodgate of western ideas" (ibid: 259). Yet another factor that played a pivotal role in the development of nationalism since the second half of nineteenth century was the advancement of literature. This generated a powerful revolution in the intellectual environment and provided a great stimulus to the newly-awakened patriotic and nationalist fervour. Furthermore, disaffection and discontent of the people with the colonial administration and foreign domination over India contributed to the growth of Indian nationalism. Last, but not the least, the enormous drain of resources from India to Britain left the former—one of the wealthiest countries in the pre-colonial age—pauperized in the course of a century. R.C. Dutt in the two volumes of his magnum opus Economic History of India "laid the foundation of a comprehensive economics of colonialism by exposing the colonial policy that was ruthlessly pursued in order that the tempo of the growth of the economy of mother country was speeded up" (Mukhopadhyay 1979: 127). All these created tremendous revulsion and opposition to British rule which became manifest through nationalist feelings.

To gain a meaningful explanation of Indian nationalism, it is important to understand the specific historical context and the cause of its development, not only the ideas that are presumed to have come from the West. One important characteristic of Indian nationalism has been the various nationalist articulations which remained fragmented throughout the entire period. It is noteworthy that not a single ideology of consensus emerged in India. Instead, ideology was articulated piecemeal, often shifting positions over time, thereby creating enormous scope for multiple and often contradictory articulations and interpretations. Consequently, we find numerous schools of nationalist thought
in India, all of which had some influence over particular milieu in particular periods in the long course of nationalist movement. A brief summary of the orientations of these schools are necessary.

2

Political awakening in the Indian subcontinent was a late phenomenon of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, leading to the emergence of nationalism in this country. India's existence as a political nation prior to the establishment of British rule is a matter of debate. There is, however, little disagreement that Indian nationalism, which confronted British imperialism in the nineteenth century and celebrated its victory with the formation of the nation-state in 1947, was a product of colonialism. In the opinion of Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2004:184ff), whether or not the seeds of such a nation lay unselfconsciously embedded in Indian civilisation and then gradually evolved through history is not so important here; what is important is that the process of nation-building in India unfolded as a process of continuous adjustment, accommodation and contestation. There is a whole range of writings that have looked at Indian nationalism from diverse ideological vantage points and historiographical perspectives. A brief sketch of some of the various schools of nationalist thought is presented below.

A. The early nationalist school focused primarily on the supremacy of a nationalist ideology and a national consciousness to which all other forms of consciousness were assumed to have been subordinated. These nationalists belonged mostly to the Indian National Congress (hitherto INC) and W.C.Bonnerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Anandamohan Bose, Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tayabji, etc., were some of the prominent leaders. For them the awareness of nation was based on a commonly shared antipathy towards colonial rule, a feeling of patriotism and an ideology rooted in a sense of pride in India's ancient tradition and heritage. But this
nationalism included only the ‘national’ issues by excluding the regional, local or marginal concerns and articulated their views through the sole channel of the English-educated middle class and their party, the Congress. Gokhale in his Presidential Address at the Banaras Congress of 1905 emphasised the point that the political rights being demanded were “not for the whole population but for such portion of it as has been qualified by education to discharge properly the responsibilities of such association” (Sarkar 1994: 36).

This school actually marginalised and excluded large sections of the population in the name of a homogenised nationalism. The social base of the nationalist movement in this phase, thinks Bipan Chandra (1996:135), “was extremely narrow, being limited to the urban educated Indians” and “did not, as is often assumed, include the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie or the zamindars and landlords.” In other words, this school ignored the inner conflicts within Indian society and assumed the existence of nation as a homogenous entity with a single set of interests. Thus, there was little in their programme to arouse the masses comprising of the uneducated peasants, workers or the urban poor and other marginalised sections. Their tendency for keeping the masses out of the mainstream nationalist movement was due to their basic tenet of bloodless and peaceful constitutional struggle for freedom and bourgeois socio-economic development. Though “from the beginning the early nationalists believed that India should eventually move towards democratic self-government...they did not demand immediate fulfilment of this goal” but “suggested a step by step approach towards freedom” (Chandra 1982: 67).

B. It was precisely on this point that the Extremist school of nationalism developed from the last decade of the nineteenth century. In their spirited protest against colonialism they highlighted the economic ruin and cultural degradation of India as perpetrated by the British—something natural for the British as foreign conquerors. Nationalism portrayed by the Extremist school of
thought was based on a passionate desire for freedom which, in turn, was based upon, like their moderate predecessors, a sense of the greatness of our ancient culture, an innate hatred of British rule on account of its iniquitous character and a spirited protest against colonialism.

The early intellectual leadership was provided by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Rajnarayan Bose, Vishnu Shastri Chipulkar, Swami Vivekenanda etc. The later extremist leadership provided by B.Tilak, G.G.Agarkar, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobinda Ghosh, Lala Lajpat Rai etc. appealed to a wider circle of the lower-middle classes, students, even a section of workers and peasants instead of only the intelligentsia and the urban middle class. The extremists did not believe in any benevolent intentions of the colonial rulers towards the subject nation and, hence, pointed out that in all essential matters the British interests were bound to be contradictory to those of India.

The extremist leaders also "had infinite faith in the power of the masses in action and in the Indian people's capacity to bear the strain of a prolonged political struggle against imperialism" (Chandra1996:129). Neither did they believe that governmental repression would "throttle the mass movement" (ibid). Hence, they shifted from intellectuals to the masses, from memorandums, petitions and resolutions to processions, demonstrations and mass movements. Their demand was for immediate and unconditional freedom, regardless of the fitness or lack of it on part of the people. Consequently, they rejected the idea of colonial self-government.

However, even at the height of the extremist movement in Bengal "the peasantry was not mobilized. The alienation between the educated Extremist political workers and the masses was not lessened to any significant extent" (ibid). In reality, what they succeeded in doing was to spread the movement deeper among the lower-middle classes. So far as technique was concerned "their own practice could not basically transcend agitation, though their agitation was much more militant and effective" (ibid: 130). Extremist
nationalism had clarified the objectives of the nationalist movement, inculcated among the people the values of self-confidence and self-reliance, and introduced new methods of political organisations and modes of struggle. Not only so, according to Bipan Chandra (1982: 94), they enlarged the social base of the movement to include hitherto many excluded sections like the lower-middle classes, students and youth, women etc. They also propagated the efficacy of the technique of passive resistance which was later brought to perfection by Gandhi. Yet, they could not transcend the vision of "social and economic development as bounded by capitalist enterprise" (ibid: 95). While their militant anti-imperialism had a considerable contribution in national consolidation, their bias for Hindu upper-castes "weakened the process of national unification and was to contribute to the bitter harvest of communalism in later years" (ibid). Their goal of complete freedom for India was merely the means to the great end, namely, the emancipation of the masses from political, economic and social ignorance and exploitation. Yet, their greatest weakness was that they, just like the moderates, "ignored the inner conflicts within society—which among other things, led to its division into two nation-states—and assumed the existence of nation as a homogenous entity with a single set of interests" (Bandyopadhyay 2004:185).

C. The Militant Nationalists or 'revolutionary terrorists', also known as armed revolutionaries, followed an ideology different from that propagated by the mainstream nationalism of Congress. The revolutionary terrorist movement began roughly from the first decade of the twentieth century and continued till the 1930s. The rise of revolutionary terrorism can be attributed to certain factors. For instance, the strategy of parliamentary politics, which was part of the dominant nationalist ideology, followed by the Congress was dissatisfactory to the militant or revolutionary nationalists. Again, withdrawal or consequent failure of the Non-cooperation movement shattered the hopes of the people,
especially the students who had abandoned their families, education, lifestyle and privileges for the cause of the movement. Moreover, these idealistic youths became upset by the degeneration of the already fragile Hindu-Muslim unity, forged in the course of the nationalist movement. Their rejection of Gandhism and Congress politics led them to socialism on the one hand, and revolutionary terrorism, on the other.

Some important names belonging to this school of nationalism are Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, Chandrasekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Ramprasad Bismil, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Sachindranath Sanyal etc. They envisaged the revolutionary potential of the working class and desired to harness it to the nationalist movement. They tried to clarify certain issues at the ideological level and in the process reached their understanding of nationalism. They sought to highlight the aims of their struggle against the foreign rulers which was not restricted to mere political liberation. Their ultimate aim was total transformation of Indian society through a revolutionary process. The new socio-political order “would end exploitation of man by man” (Thakur 1952: 9). The socio-political changes desired by them called for “a new order of society in which political and economic exploitation will be an impossibility” (Bhagwati Charan Vohra in The philosophy of the Bomb, quoted in Chandra 1996: 236).

Such radical transformation of society required revolutionary strategy and movement because the task of regeneration had to be preceded by the task of destruction. Hence, they also projected the necessity of developing and organising a mass movement of exploited and suppressed sections for the purpose of demolishing the present socio-political order and reconstructing a wholly new social order. Revolution, thus, implied total struggle along with chaos and anarchy, where victory also had to be total. According to the Manifesto of HSRA [Hindustan Socialist Republican (Army) Association] in 1929, “Revolution is not a philosophy of despair or a creed of desperadoes....It is a vital living force which is indicative of eternal conflict between the Old and the
New, between Life and Living Death, between Light and Darkness....Revolution is Law, Revolution is Order and Revolution is the Truth” (ibid: 234–5). Revolution was not merely an act to the revolutionary terrorists—it had a wider social content, namely, change of the existing order based on manifest injustice. From this view of the purpose of revolution a natural progression occurred in the demand for a socialist society.

Socialism, thus, became the official goal of the militant nationalists. At the economic plane this socialism proposed nationalisation of railways and other means of transport and communication, large-scale industries, etc. It suggested organisation of cooperative unions for private and small-scale enterprises. At the ideological level socialism was seen as an anti-thesis to capitalism and imperialism. The militant nationalists or revolutionary terrorists realised that capitalist economic exploitation was closely connected to modern imperialism and enslavement of nations. To overthrow such domination and enslavement a new correlation of classes was necessary at the domestic level. Thus, it became necessary to identify the domestic exploiters along with the foreign ones. As Bhagat Singh wrote in a message from the prison on March 3, 1931, "...It matters little whether these exploiters are purely British capitalists, or British and Indians in alliance, or purely Indians” (ibid: 242). Removal of exploitation, oppression and social differences on the one hand, and emancipation of the hitherto exploited classes, on the other, would necessitate a new state structure where power will be controlled by peasants and workers. Only then the interests of the masses will be protected.

However, due to their lack of a detailed analysis of the class structure of Indian society and structure of Indian capitalism and its relation to imperialism, they could not transfer theory into practice. Their lack of faith in the capitalists and other upper classes made them turn to the peasants and workers for the revolutionary transformation of society. But neither could they motivate the latter to their programmes and activities, nor could they organise genuine mass
movements—their recognition of the revolutionary potential of the masses remained at the level of theory only. The urban middle and lower-middle class youth became the vanguard of the revolution—yet, their heroic deeds made them heroes without touching the people or classes which figured in their construction of the social base of the nationalist movement. The revolutionary socialist ideology could not be injected within the nationalist consciousness; hence, they could neither provide any alternative leadership to the bourgeois Congress leadership nor convert the scattered, potentially radical manifestations into a coherent movement. Furthermore, their heroic deeds, sacrifices and slogans were taken over by the Congress to popularise its own brand of nationalism. Last, but not the least, the fruits of their success was left untouched by the Left movement in the later years.

It might be concluded that not only political independence but also post-independence reconstruction had figured within the objectives and programmes of the militant nationalists. But a series of contradictions between their ideology and activities contributed to their failure to maintain the integrity of their original group and objectives, lead a genuine mass movement of peasants and workers and initiate unified armed struggle for complete transformation of India's socio-political scenario. Ultimately, they remained confined within the parameters of 'nationalism' as conceived and practiced by the bourgeois-middle class dominated Congress.

D. The Gandhian era of Indian nationalist movement is perceived as the period in which nationalism became multi-class and mass-based, gained politico-moral legitimacy and achieved enormous power due to its indigenous tone and style. Gandhian nationalism rests on a fundamental critique of the idea of—modern, industrial civilisation and the resulting civil-society. In the opinion of M. Gandhi, as the Indian people were seduced by the glitter and glamour of the modern West, so there had occurred a moral failure on their part which led to
their subjection to colonial rule. Furthermore, acceptance of the supposed benefits and progressive qualities of this civilisation by some leading sections of Indian society has kept this subjection intact. Hence, to Gandhi, the real enemy was not British political domination alone but also the modern, industrial society with its culture of increasing production, acquisition and consumption. Gandhi, thus, tried to forge a new national formula of political alignment to initiate the new politics of wresting moral authority from the colonial rulers.

In the opinion of Amlan Datta (2009:140) when “Gandhiji appeared on the Indian political scene, discontent against the British raj had already become a force in the ranks of the middle class. But this discontent had carved out for itself only the fruitless channel of terrorism, and possibly in large measure terrorism was getting inwardly diffident about its potency.” Hence, Gandhi’s experiments with Satyagraha against the vastly suppressive powers of the imperialist government caught the imagination of the common people. For this Gandhi initiated a programme of intense political mobilisation among the educated elite of the backward provinces, trading communities, landlords, to some extent the rural elite and the masses with stage-by-stage implementation of non-violent Non-cooperation. Inspite of contradictory opinions regarding the nature and success or otherwise of the Non-cooperation Movement, it cannot be denied that “political mobilization itself became an actuality for the first time in nationalist politics in serious fashion” (Aloysius1997: 179). It actually infused a new sense of self-respect into the nation, a sense of moral superiority over the violent and oppressive rulers. Not only so, this sense of superiority gave the people the courage to face violence. The leftist critics had been of the opinion in the early nineteen thirties that Gandhi’s programmes had been really dictated by the interests of the Indian capitalists who had insisted on the strict observance of non-violence because “it intended to avoid revolutionary upheaval by insurgent masses” (2009:141). However, says Datta, “It is impossible even for opponents of Gandhism to deny, consistently with observed facts, this
A major achievement of Gandhian nationalism was mobilisation of the peasantry. This became possible due to Gandhi’s ability to articulate the contradictions of the capitalist process of production, distribution and property relations in an idiom intelligible to the peasant and artisan masses. According to Partha Chatterjee (Guha 1999:153–195), recent research has indicated that the Gandhian ideology had enlarged the purview of Indian nationalism, especially its mass peasant following. Not only so, the ethics of moral economy outside the premises and reason of western enlightenment has been attached to this brand of nationalism (ibid). Gandhi’s communitarian principles distinguished his break from the liberal limits of other ideological trends in Indian nationalism. The liberals could not deny the improvements brought about by British rule in India while Marx in his article ‘British Rule in India’, published in the New York Daily Tribune, number 3840, on August 8, 1853 suggested the progressive role
of the forced inception of capitalism in India (Marx and Engels 1977: 488–93). This was an impediment to enlarging the nationalist movement into a people’s war. Gandhian nationalism sought to remove this impediment by extending the limits of mediation on part of the elite as the question of improvement under British rule had no meaning for the people as a whole. Gandhi’s communitarian ethos against an individualistic, acquisitive society appealed to the masses and represented a significant break in Indian nationalist thought.

However, Gandhi’s refusal to be part of a mass struggle the moment it seemed to get beyond his control, signified his disinclination to let the revolutionary ethos of the peasants and workers prevail over the ethic of the burgher. As communitarian verities could have had transformative significance only through revolutionary politics, so Gandhian nationalism could not go beyond the limits of bourgeois power. As Ashok Sen wrote on Gandhi in his article “Capital, Class and Community” (Guha 1987: 220), “His moment of discontinuity with elite perception was eventually dissolved in the passive denouement of elite nationalism.” It has been criticised that the object of political mobilisation of the peasantry was not at all what Gandhi had claimed on its behalf. In the opinion of Partha Chatterjee, in his article ‘Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society’ (Guha 1999: 193), it was not undertaken “to train the masses in self-consciousness and attainment of power.” Contrarily, they were being sought for political expediency and nothing more. Their solidarity with the nationalist movement was through their sheer numerical strength but passive, inactive presence. Non-violence was used as a safety-valve to prevent revolution, terrorism, disorder, militancy in any form and edge out the threat of mass revolt by lower-caste peasantry on the one hand, and the challenge of more radical ideologies both within and outside the Congress. Gandhian mobilisation was not an attempt to bring the masses into politics but to divert them from their own autonomous or semi-autonomous political agenda. They were necessary for their demonstrative effect, to aid, follow and boost the elite
whenever and wherever required. As G. Aloysius (1997: 203) is of the opinion, they were reduced “to the level of political show-pieces in the power bargain between two sets of elites.” The masses were necessary to Gandhi; yet, he was always in a dilemma as how to unleash just enough of the mass movement in order to drive a successful bargain while at the same time save India from a revolution. Like his predecessors in the Congress, the purpose of Gandhi was to gain national legitimacy and monopoly power as the supreme leader of the Indian nationalist struggle. It has been further alleged by scholars like Asish Nandy, Bhikhu Parekh, M.Edwards, D.Keer, etc., that “as the dictator of an all-India body, Gandhi was possessive of his monopoly control over all organisations he headed, and was answerable to none but his own ‘inner voice’” (ibid: 186).

To retain his monopoly control over power, Gandhi, on the one hand, completely nullified any scope of acquiring political initiative by the masses; on the other hand, he erected the “so-called superior framework of religion or ethics” for political conduct (ibid: 182). It is common knowledge today that Gandhi was materially patronised by the business interests of Gujarat and elsewhere, so much so that, he took care never to antagonize the all-powerful upper caste and business interests in the cause of the uplift of the masses.

Gandhi was also completely insensitive to the cultural differentiation and uneven historical and social development of the different communities in the subcontinent. He perceived India to be a monolithic cultural community with the same socio-cultural characteristics everywhere. Uniformising aspects of Indian culture were to be nurtured while diversification was considered to be an aberration. Hence, quite naturally the vested interests formed the basis of this uniformised nationalism and they usually belonged to a thin but, dominant upper caste/class strata of different linguistic regions. They were unified not in terms of national unity and cultural symbols of Indianness; their national culture was to enable them to maintain their dominance over the masses. Interestingly, the national leadership in Bengal and Maharashtra remained unconvinced
regarding this uniformised culture of India and Gandhi had to locate the gravitational centre of his nationalism in the cow-belt in Hindi heartland where cultural differentiation was at its lowest.

Furthermore, Gandhian nationalism encouraged the development of two antagonistic vertical communities based on religion and religious identities where the masses were placed under the presumed elites of the respective communities, elites who were already leaders of the nationalist movement. According to A.N. Das, "A disastrous fall-out of this is the instrumental and mostly hypocritical use of religion to cover up power pursuits, degrading both religion and politics" (ibid). Actually, it implied religion for the masses and politics for the elites, the leaders. Congress came to represent the political interests of the Hindus while Muslim League that of the Muslims, and Gandhi as the supreme Hindu leader, became the protector of his community's integrity. Thus, in the Gandhian era nationalist consciousness was interspersed with religious consciousness. The colluding elite of both communities, by silent agreements, were committed to restraining by force the masses from their dangerous march towards unity based on new secular political interests.

Gandhi's idea of nation-building, according to Ashok Sen, implied the destruction of alien projects as a total system "without making fine distinctions between its pernicious effects and its so-called improvements. One could argue that his was an atavistic utopia tilting at the satanic wheels of capitalism" (Guha 1987: 218). The total negation of British power and its civilising instruments had a necessary appeal for the multitude. However, such negation was countered by the Gandhian alternative of the eternal village of the per-colonial days, which was supposed to be reproduced in all its monotony all over the subcontinent, and would effectively isolate and atomise the people. Hence, while Gandhi was ostensibly searching for an ideology to unite the whole people in the nationalist movement, he was prescribing total isolation and atomisation in the name of self-sufficiency.
Nationalism as represented by Gandhi failed to grasp the very essence of a nation as a new and equitable form of power-sharing. Moreover, he also failed to seize the opportunity to hegemonise the contesting groups which were inadequately represented by other trends of nationalist thought. Gandhian critique of civil society actually intended to reestablish the old Brahminical elite order whose interests were completely contradictory to those of the masses. Gandhian nationalism envisaged no, or at best, minimal changes which would be “more formal than substantial. Instead of effecting any significant change in the structure, style and direction of the movement and its leadership, its earlier weaknesses and limitations were successfully transformed into strengths and vantage points” (Aloysius1997: 213) which were advantageous to a small minority. It can be said in the final analysis after Amlan Datta (2009:145ff) that, no humanist movement is really complete without rationalism. Yet, “Gandhian humanism, otherwise lofty, has been vitiated by its link with mysticism and unreason, its failure to combine with the critical spirit of rationalism” (ibid). It can be said without doubt that the most significant contribution of Gandhian thought in our time lies in its sincere endeavour to “address the question of how to reconcile the spirit of non-violence with the moral requirement to oppose injustice” (ibid: 170).

E. An important variant of nationalist thought came from the subaltern scholars. It emerged as the critique of the mainstream i.e. elite ideology of nationalism. The subaltern group formed a relatively autonomous political domain with specific features and collective mentalities. This was a world distinct from the domain of the elite politicians who in early twentieth century came largely from upper caste, educated, professional categories, often connected with zamindari or intermediate tenure-holding. Propertied classes, along with a handful of Muslim elites in the subcontinent, became synonymous to upper castes. The Sudras, Ati Sudras, tribals and Muslim masses represented the
dispossessed, 'subaltern' according to later, post-independence terminology. The Muslim masses, in majority cases, were converts from Hindu lower castes and shared unmistakable signs of unity with their Hindu counterparts in being antagonistically poised towards the upper caste/class elites.

Down to 1919 the autonomy of the subaltern domain found expression through two distinct forms: general passivity vis-à-vis efforts at patriotic mobilisation from the top, and a variety of more or less militant actions distant from and sometimes directly opposed to the nationalism of the upper castes. One of the reasons attributed for their alienation from nationalist mobilisation is that the colonial order facilitated the unification of power and maintenance of social dominance of the upper castes within the newly created administrative structure and expanding civil society whereas the subalterns remained excluded and alienated from the entire process.

However, this did not automatically imply that the subalterns were passive or mindless victims who were incapable of autonomous consciousness or thought-process. They were in no way apathetic or dormant. On the contrary, there was a restlessness among them all over the subcontinent. They tried to utilise every opportunity to get out of the traditional order of dominance and subjugation. It was manifest through their attempts at sanskritisation, education, claims for employment at par with the other castes and claims for representation in various public forums. These communities, in effect, were struggling for a principle of egalitarianism as the new norm for social relationships. As the subalterns endeavoured to overcome the traditional ascriptive loyalties, so their consciousness and movements were articulated as anti-Brahminic, anti-hierarchical and pro-democratisation aspirations. Consequently, their resistance could not acquire the scale of articulation and coherence which could bring them to the forefront of an evolving identity on a national scale. A major cause responsible for fragmenting subaltern insurgency, thinks Ashok Sen (Guha 1987: 207), was "the failure of the elite leadership to identify itself with the mind
and energy of grassroot revolt." Their radicalism in consciousness and movements remained beyond the purview and comprehension of elite politics. The counterthrusts from subaltern groups was perpetually sought to be thwarted by the supervening interruption of the elite nationalists who "often conspired with the colonial power to weaken and suppress those movements" (ibid) by the subalterns.

Within the sociological paradigm of nationalism two strands of consciousness—subaltern and upper caste/class elite—became distinct from each other. In the movement for the emergence of the nation as a modern political community these two strands of consciousness and social forces representing them stood antagonistically in relation to each other. The masses were calling for the demolition of the Brahminical social order while the upper castes were struggling to reincarnate it as nationalist ideology. In the words of B.R. Ambedkar, for the servile classes, "what they expect to happen in a sovereign and free India is a complete destruction of Brahminism as a philosophy of life and as a social order...the servile classes do not care for social amelioration. The want and poverty which has been their lot is nothing to them as compared to the insult and indignity which they have to bear as a result of the vicious social order. Not bread, but honour is what they want" (Rodrigues 2002:144). However, in the nationalist discourse of the elite a major orientation was to prevent the emergence of this very situation i.e. prevents the emergence of the nation. The autonomy of the lower-caste masses was to be denied at all costs and their differential as well as modern political agenda including the need for social mobility, education, diversification of occupation etc. were to be submerged. But for the subalterns, nationalism signified a way to forge and formulate their own distinct identity. They saw it as an opportunity for their emergence as a separate, distinct but inseparable part of the new nation.

In the initial phases the immediate goals were primarily localised economic issues and the vision of contemporary tribal and other subaltern
leaders could not embrace anything broader than a heroic defence of their homeland against all intruders, both imperialist and non-imperialist. In the later phases of subaltern political thought and movement the issues became much more wider in content and national in sense that it touched the entire underprivileged mass of the subcontinent. In the opinion of Gautam Bhadra, as found in his article 'Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-seven' (Guha 1985), often in the case of popular rebellions 'ordinary' people became leaders whose vision ranged far beyond their immediate grievances. They understood that the collapse of the British Raj—that formidable instrument of repression—in the people's consciousness would be an important factor. Only then, says B.B. Choudhury in his essay "Subaltern Autonomy and the National Movement" (Ludden 2005:131), the marginalised, subaltern masses would be able to take the initiative, long denied to them and create "an alternative structure of authority and power" which would embody "this initiative and also the people's aspirations."

It is in the writings of B.R. Ambedkar that the nation-wide civil rights movements of the subalterns (shudras and atishudras) was transformed through the concept of equal citizenship into an all-embracing ideology of a struggle and aspiration towards a society built upon modern national principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. Ambedkar's concept of an ideal society in the form of a social democracy was inextricably connected with the issue of the liberation of the depressed castes. Social democracy, to him (1989: 57,222), was not merely a form of government—but "primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint, communicated experience." To Ambedkar, nation, nationality and nationalism included not only lower-caste Hindus, but Muslims, tribals and other marginalised people as well. His concern was for the whole—the nation—of which he hoped the depressed castes would become not only an integral but an indistinguishable part as well. So 'nationality' was a social feeling, a sentiment of oneness among its adherents. Hence, it follows that 'nation' was to be viewed as
a comradeship, a consciousness of common and united sympathies. Such a
nation, to Ambedkar, was a new form of social and societal relationship built on
the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. The ideals of the French
Revolution were employed to further age-old aspirations and struggle of the
depressed caste masses towards an egalitarian and democratic society which is
incompatible and inconsistent with exclusion and isolation resulting from the
distinction between the privileged and the under-privileged. Hence, the
ideology of nationalism and the resultant movement was appropriated by
Ambedkar in order to promote the aspirations and objectives of the subaltern
masses.

In India we have a substantial amount of research and knowledge on
nationalism by the Marxist scholars. Desai as a practicing Marxist belongs to this
school of thought and his expositions should be placed in a continuum along
with the observations of other Marxist scholars of India who devoted their
scholarly attention to the phenomenon of nationalism.

Manabendranath Roy, one of the founders of communism in India,
expresses his views on Indian nationalism in his celebrated work *India in
Transition*. For him, India till pre-British period was nothing more than a
geographical expression, distinct from the rest of Asia by physical barriers. From
such existence acquiring political nationhood was conditional upon the
development of material forces which could make such fusion possible.
Backward productive forces had enabled the people to live in self-contained
isolated communities. It was capitalist imperialism which had forced political
unity upon India. However, Roy maintains (1971: 9) that at the time of British
conquest, India was no longer in the stage of feudalism but in a state of
transition. The oriental feudal society which Marx saw being destroyed in the
1860s and 1870s, Roy describes as actually destroyed. The significance of this
period was that it witnessed the passing of "long and long years of forced
stagnation” and “the progressive forces latent in the Indian society are asserting themselves” (ibid, 16). Thus, India was also not yet capitalist “but the country had by and large been drawn within the orbit of the capitalist system” (ibid: 10). Roy, a believer in Marxism, had pinned his hopes of an Indian revolution upon the worker because “In spite of its rapid growth, the Indian bourgeoisie is weak and unsteady in its purpose; but before the worker there is nothing but struggle. It is he, having nothing to lose but his chains, on whom ultimately depends the national freedom...” (ibid: 11). Then Roy very correctly observes that political freedom for the worker would not have any significance without socio-economic liberation.

Roy identified the national movement as a struggle of the native middle class against the politico-economic monopoly of the imperialist bourgeoisie. But he also thought that support of the masses essential for success. In this context he discovered another layer of the nationalist movement which he deemed (ibid: 203) as “the revolt of the exploited against the exploiting class, irrespective of nationality.” He correctly understood (ibid: 240) the historical weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie which prevented it from defeating colonialism by itself and “it must depend upon mass action for imposing its will.” But as the mass movement cannot always be kept within limits convenient to the leadership, so he foresaw (ibid) “the eventual divorce of the mass movement from bourgeois leadership...and the liberation of India will be left to the political movement of the workers and peasants, consciously organised and fighting on the grounds of class struggle.” In “What Do We Want” Roy elaborates (ibid: 283) that the fundamental motive of the struggle will be to abolish the sources of human exploitation, those being “the system of private property, of production for profit, in a word, Capitalism.” The masses will have to be made conscious of their potentialities “to develop the spontaneous awakening and intensify their rebellious spirit of leading their struggle for the redress of their grievances” (ibid: 284). Thus, nationalism to M.N. Roy will be brought to its
fulfilment by socialist revolution—for “nothing short of a radical readjustment of the national economy can improve the situation. There must be a revolution in order to change not only the superstructure but the very basis of socio-economics” (ibid: 10).

For S.A. Dange also, a contemporary of M.N. Roy, the national liberation movement was not to culminate with mere political freedom but was to continue much further until the successful completion of a socialist revolution. In his view (1974:111), “our constitutional agitation has accomplished almost nothing, beyond arousing the nation.” He too had ultimate faith in the working class—“the whole movement of government terrorism will be paralysed and it will have to yield...if the Indian labour will not flinch and do its duty, we will succeed...If we win, we will win only by the help of the proletariat, i.e. the labourers and peasantry. They are our main support” (ibid: 118-19).

He foresees the possibility of class struggle between capital and labour both at urban and rural theatres because the nationalist movement had nothing to offer to the lower and down-trodden masses—their grievances were not redressed or expectations fulfilled during the nationalist movement. Writing in the Socialist on August 5, 1922 (ibid: 138), he was aware that the national liberation movement “had not reached the real people...the merchants, manufacturers and traders saw the visions of their future wealth in it. We could convince the middle-class enthusiasts, by appealing to their inner thrust for power and pelf.” But for the lower and down-trodden “we could create neither visions nor facts for them” (ibid). He acknowledged in “Hell Found” (ibid: 306) that the Indian capitalists had, at times, fought for the poor Indians, but he attributes that to the fact that the former were themselves “bossed by a higher Imperialist. Once he is gone, the class differentiations will become clearer, which are, for the present, blurred by the unifying influence, exerted on us by the presence of foreign Imperialism.” Thus, mere political independence without accompanying socio-economic transformations would defeat the higher
motivations of the nationalist movement itself. He concludes (ibid, 306ff) that only when the owning class of the present is substituted by the labouring classes, which are a majority, when the class-ownership of the necessities of life and the means that produce them are destroyed and a complete social reorganisation is effected, then only real liberation will be ushered in.

Dhirendranath Sen was another pre-eminent scholar of the period who employed the Marxist method of enquiry in the analysis of nationalism and other related political aspects of the 1940s. Sen's understanding of nationalism was apparently quite close to the dominant Marxist views of the times but he did not accept fully Stalin's understanding of the issue in reference to India. For Stalin (1993) modern nationhood was a product of the epoch of the rise of capitalism as witnessed in Western Europe. With the overthrow of feudalism and establishment of nation-states the State came under the control of one dominant nation while the weaker nationalities were subjected to the domination of the former, later on to expand as colonies of European States. Ultimately to assert the right of national self-determination in the European colonies nationalism became a movement which included the desire for politico-cultural-economic-social liberation from colonialism—"a movement for the overthrow of the oppressing power." (Sen 2005:187). To Sen this was the form 'nationalism' had taken in India. On the one hand, this nationalism tried to project India as a single homogenous entity, thereby denying the recognition of the notion of socio-cultural heterogeneity and differences as manifest in the plurality of ethnic groups, tribes and communities in the country. On the other hand, according to Shobhanlal Dattagupta (ibid: V) this 'nationalism' to Sen "as a project of modernity" was "basically anti-democratic in orientation and counterproductive in nature" because the Nehruvian understanding "hardly touched the tribals, the Dalits, and other oppressed strata of society." So ultimately, Indian nationalism to Sen was equivalent to Hindu communalism as
propagated by the propertied landlords and bourgeoisie through the mechanism of the INC.

Hirendranath Mukherjee, an eminent leader of the C.P.I., practicing politician and reputed parliamentarian of independent India, never saw nationalism as a monolithic movement. While the main thrust was against colonialism, it had several sub-national tendencies and issues which found expression through the most dominant movement of the times, i.e. the nationalist movement. Colonialism created the objective conditions for the emergence of nationalism—Mukherjee says (1962a: 96) after Marx that the “British rule in the country was ‘the unconscious tool of history’ in the development of India.” Yet, like M.N. Roy he does not accept colonialism as the sole reason/determinant for/of India’s transformation to a qualitatively better phase of civilisation than the prevalent one. He was of the opinion (ibid) that “the traditional Indian society was” already in state of “such decay” that it was “sooner or later, doomed to defeat and demolition.” We find an echo of the same opinion from Rajani Palme-Dutt, “...there is some reason to judge that the traditional Indian society in decomposition at the moment of the British conquest was trembling on the verge of the first stage of the bourgeois revolution on the basis of its own resources, when the already matured British bourgeois revolution overtook it in the phase of disorder and transition, and was able to establish its domination. But in the actual historical record this destruction was the achievement of British rule” (1997: 304). Hence, the scholars are of the opinion that the British released the new forces necessary for the maturation of the objective material conditions, but the germination of nationalist ideals, forces and movements are to be attributed to the indigenous people. Palme-Dutt (ibid: 303) puts it more lucidly by observing that “the Indian national movement arose from social conditions, from the conditions of imperialism and its system of exploitation, and from the social and economic forces generated within Indian society under the conditions of that
exploitation." He continues that Indian nationalism signifies the history of advancing consciousness and mass basis which can reach fulfilment only through far reaching social liberation, i.e. if the interests of the masses are fulfilled rather than the interests of imperialism and indigenous privileged sections "which seek cooperation with imperialism" (ibid: 318). Hiren Mukherjee was also of the same mind and he felt (1984: 22ff) that the nationalist movement in India ultimately did not become a revolutionary movement due to Gandhi's fears of mass militancy— the masses were never allowed to reach the highest levels of their potentiality and in this matter E.M.S. Namboodiripad (1958:115ff), noted communist politician and leader, was also of the same opinion.

The discussion would remain incomplete without an account of the thoughts of another eminent scholar, namely Bhupendranath Datta, who can be regarded as one of the pioneers of Indian sociological understanding through the methodology of dialectical and historical materialism. Datta, member of a revolutionary party of Bengal engaged in secret terrorist activities against the colonial government, had acquired a close knowledge and awareness regarding the miseries and sufferings of the people. In the course of his revolutionary activities he became aware that neither the agitational politics of the Congress nor the revolutionary movement, of which he himself was a part, had any link to the masses and therefore, was inadequate to alleviate their distress. Certain events like the defeat of Germany in the First World War, failure of the revolutionary activities of the Berlin Committee, setbacks of the attempted armed uprisings inside India etc. undermined his faith in the armed revolutionary activities undertaken by the Indian revolutionary parties. Simultaneous success of the Russian revolution profoundly influenced him and he tried to find ways of socio-economic emancipation through a social revolution of the Russian type. A comparative analysis of the revolutionary movements across the world convinced him that the working people were the
greatest revolutionary force of any society. Hence, in any revolutionary movement success depended upon the level of involvement of the workers, common people, “people who had a stake in the issues of the liberation movement” (Chattopadhyay 1994:31). In case of India, the peasantry had to become the revolutionary vanguard class because it constituted a vast majority of the Indian population. To do so, a radical socio-economic transformation, to ensure economic emancipation of the peasantry, was necessary. Datta, in order to establish a proper historical context, projected the importance of a comprehensive social history of India which would record the activities and achievements of the people of India. It can be mentioned here that Bhupendranath had been a pioneer in writing this kind of history where the voice of the common man will be paramount. Such history could be written only on the basis of a correct method of historical analysis which would provide not only objective insights into Indian social reality, but would also act as a guide to concrete action for building up a classless equalitarian society. Such method, he said, could be found in dialectical and historical materialism, and upon this he elaborated his conception of society and social development.

Bhupendranath’s departure from traditional Marxism and his uniqueness consisted in the fact that he did not believe in any automatic development of human society. According to Amal Chattopadhyay (ibid: 38–39), Bhupendranath held that “social change was caused by constantly changing antagonistic and contradictory social forces. Society did not change automatically by being propelled by the economic conditions. It needed the intervention of active men who were endowed with consciousness.” Furthermore, consciousness was essential to know one’s purpose in life. Without this self-knowledge or cognition of purpose, the individual as well as classes remained blind and inactive. Hence, intervention by conscious human beings was necessary to comprehend the phenomenal process of society, the problems and needs of society and the possibilities of actions open to it. This
consciousness on part of the labouring classes had to be instilled from outside and here the intellectuals had an important role to play. The latter would provide criticisms of the existing order, expose its reactionary character, understand the psychology of the suffering masses and identify with their interests. Bhupendranath observed (ibid: 43) that this intellectual ferment would extend to the political plane and provide the foundations for subsequent socio-economic transformations of society. Not only so, he “believed that unless a revolution appeared in the world of thought, it would not be possible to grasp and follow the objective material and economic conditions of the society” (ibid). Hence, a revolution, which implied a radical change in society by removing the roots of all social and economic oppression and inequality, required both the maturity of objective social forces as well as the subjective factor of consciousness on part of the revolutionary forces. However, Bhupendranath was aware that revolutionary ferment always did not lead to a successful uprising. He understood that a period of failure of revolution and corresponding reaction could be overcome and transcended through a new programme of revolutionary action based on a new philosophy of social action. Says Amal Chattopadhyay, “His attempt to combine the insights of Freudian psychology with his theory of society and social change was not only novel but very bold and revolutionary at a time when the study of Freudian psychology was forbidden for the Marxists” (ibid: 156).

Like other Marxist thinkers Bhupendranath was also of the opinion that the politically and economically dominant class in society controlled the production, dissemination and percolation of ideas. But he did not subscribe to the view that the oppressed classes were totally enveloped by the ruling ideology. On the contrary, the history of India from the ancient period to the present shows that rebellious and alternative ideas are always present in society. The dominant class tries, on the one hand, to propagate its ideas as the only ideology in society, and on the other, cripple the rebellious ideas of the oppressed classes.
in order to reconcile them to the existing life conditions. Bhupendranath was of the opinion that contradictory and differential life situations of the oppressed classes always produces alternative ideologies which actually emphasises “the reality of revolutionary potential of the oppressed and exploited working masses,” thereby “keeping alive the hope of social development and progress through the action of the labouring classes” (ibid: 157).

Bhupendranath’s seminal contribution has been in showing the dynamic nature of Indian civilisation in the course of providing a social history of the country. To him Indian society, rather than being static and backward, had actually provided a civilisation much superior to its contemporaries. Indian society was a mixture of materialistic and spiritual, worldly and other-worldly at the same time. Moreover, he says this society was also not totally harmonic and peaceful. Class divisions, exploitation, oppression existed side by side with protests, revolts and resistance. He also tried to expose the distortion of the image of the Indian past, systematically made “by both the European and national scholars” (ibid: 163). In their opinion India required “so-called civilised imperialist rule” on the one hand, and “enlightened foreign religion” on the other, “to make India a civilised and this worldly society” (ibid). His contributions in this regard, thinks Chattopadhyay (ibid: 164) “are still of great relevance because our historical and sociological consciousness are still not free from such distortion” and he was “successful in laying down the foundation for the reconstruction of the social history of India.”

The other areas of his contributions to the development of Indian sociology lies in his detailed account of the evolution of feudalism in India, the sociological definition and analysis of the Indian caste system and the gradual transformation of the class division into caste division and finally, the study of religious institutions in India. Bhupendranath’s seminal and path-breaking contribution has been in liberating these concepts from the conventional idealist approach and placing it on a historical materialist foundation. However,
as the intellectual and cultural life of the people are still influenced even today by feudal and semi-feudal ideology, religious superstition, caste prejudices, general illiteracy, etc., the material and intellectual development of the people of India have not occurred as it should had done. This is because, says Chattopadhyay, “Indian sociology has so far failed to respond adequately to this reality and to suggest plausible solutions of these agonising problems” (ibid: 195). Actually, theoretical and conceptual orientations of Indian sociology are still derived from the dominant theories of the West. As Desai was to say later that the value orientation of Indian sociology is related primarily to western liberal democracy rather than to the specific situation and conditions of Indian socio-political reality. Hence, to advance further and attain credibility Indian sociology has to take into account pioneers like Bhupendranath Datta whose theoretical and methodological perspective gives a concrete base for investigation and comprehension of Indian social reality.

4

For Desai nationalism in India was not merely a phenomenon but an event—“it had epic dimension” as “it enveloped the striving and struggles for transformation of one-fifth of humanity” (1981:VII-IX). To him, political-economic-social-cultural structures and situations contribute to the creation of social forces which are the vanguard of national awakening in any country. “Every nation was thus born and forged in a unique way” (ibid: 3) because the determining and conditioning features differ from country to country. Desai’s area of interest is in the birth and development of Indian nationalism against the backdrop of colonialism. To understand this, as Desai has perceived it, one has to trace its roots back to the period when “the action and inter-action of numerous subjective and objective forces and factors which developed within the Indian society under the conditions of the British rule and the impact of world forces” (ibid: 5).
Pre-British Indian society, economy and polity underwent major qualitative changes during the British colonial era. The latter was the period of the birth of Indian nationalism which progressed up to the post-colonial independent stage. Nationalism, to Desai, remains one of the most dominant determinants of Indian politics, even after liberation from colonialism, because politico-juridical-administrative independence was not accompanied by genuine socio-economic liberation. Desai is also skeptical about the nation-building process in India. However, to him, nationalism is a multi-faceted movement, assuming different forms in different periods of Indian history.

To understand this development one has to take a brief glance at the pre-British stage and the structural-functional transformations initiated by the British which created the material basis for the emergence and development of nationalism in India. Here Desai differs slightly from some of his contemporaries; for instance, Hiren Mukherjee also accepts that colonialism was the major, but not the sole, force behind the emergence of Indian nationalism because in his opinion the traditional Indian society had already degenerated to such an extent that it was quite ripe for a complete overhaul. (Mukherjee 1962: 96). To come back to Desai, this material basis created the conditions for the emergence of a new form of social stratification—‘classes’ began to appear side-by-side with the centuries old ‘castes’. The new classes influenced the nationalist movement as they developed, participated and gave leadership to it. But it must be remembered that as the material conditions for the emergence of classes matured at different points of time and at different paces during colonial rule, so the new classes did not emerge simultaneously, nor was their development equal. As a consequence, Nationalism in India was neither a homogenous perception, nor did it influence all the people similarly and simultaneously. The background of colonial political subjection contributed to the unleashing of new social forces which “by their very nature came into conflict with British
Imperialism and became the basis of and provided motive power for the rise and development of Indian nationalism" (Desai 1981: 6).

The movement had a single overarching objective, namely, ouster of British colonialism; yet, there were a number of other and often parallel objectives connected to the multiple classes, groups and strata participating in the nationalist movement. Liberation from colonialism did not fulfil all these parallel objectives; hence, in post-independence situation these multiple trends and tendencies became more apparent than a homogenous, united nation-building process. Just as in colonial India nationalism became manifest through multiple, heterogeneous movements, so also in independent India the multifaceted movements came to represent the nationalist aspirations of various linguistic, ethnic, religious or even regional groups. Hence, Desai saw the termination of British rule as the basic objective of nationalism in the colonial era. In the post-colonial scenario this basic objective was transformed into demands for redressal of continuing exploitation, injustice and ills of a society by those who had not benefited by the retreat of the British.

The British rulers destroyed all indigenous forms of economy, polity and society in India and constructed alternative counterparts to suit their own interests. The changes were initiated not with a view to develop or modernise India but to serve the purpose of European in general, and British industrial efforts in particular. Hence, the transformations were neither natural, nor spontaneous, but were imposed from elsewhere and often by force. However, these transformations brought about a qualitative change in Indian political, economic and social systems which negated any possibility of retreat to the pre-colonial stage. This new system, on the one hand, provided the material basis of nationalism in a colonial country. On the other hand, persistence of the system, created by colonialism, has been somewhat responsible for the surge of nationalism in the post-colonial period.
Before the advent of British colonialism the basic economic unit had been the agro-based village system where the prime objective of production was local consumption. This system was characterised by its lack of "any appreciable exchange relations with the outside world" as well as the absence of "the phenomenon of a market" (ibid: 10). A debate arose on the issue of the self-sufficiency of the village-system—Desai is of the opinion that the villages as basic units of production were self-sufficient and hence, closed systems with little or no need for contact with the outside world. However, other scholars differ on the issue. For instance, D. Thorne (1966:44, 57), D.N.Dhanagare (1983: 28), etc., were skeptical regarding the self-sufficient nature of the village-system. (Detailed discussion of the issue has been made in Ch. 4).

Another major distinction of the pre-colonial world was the absence of private property in land, which, thought Desai, belonged collectively to the rural community rather than to the state or any private individual. This is also a contentious issue and scholars differ significantly over it. Engels had believed that the Orient had to be understood in terms of its "absence of private property in land" (Palme-Dutt 1997: 84). Palme-Dutt (1997: 85), D. Chattopadhyay (Desai 2003:160), etc., also subscribe to this view. However, scholars like D.D. Kosambi (Desai 2003:149), S. Naqvi (Bhadra 1989: 23), Irfan Habib (Habib 1963; Bhadra 1989: 25), D.N.Dhanagare (1983: 28), Bula Bhadra (Bhadra 1989: 23), etc., strongly counter the above argument and cite numerous instances supporting the case for the presence of private property in land. (Detailed discussion of the issue has been made in Ch. 4). Desai, however, was of the opinion that the feudal nobility had the right only to collect appropriate land revenue from the village as tax. Consequently, unlike the European feudal nobility, its Indian counterpart had no proprietary rights over land. Common ownership by the community instead of any individual ownership was the general practice.

Another distinctive feature of this system was the low level of division of labour due to little or no differentiation between agriculture and industry. The
latter was almost wholly of cottage and household variety with family labour being employed in both—each village formed a compact whole producing all that it required. This “autarchic village, almost completely independent of the outside world...remained for centuries an invulnerable stronghold of the same stationary, stereotyped social existence” (Desai 1981:11). They remained practically untouched by political events and turmoil because “kingdoms rose and collapsed but the self-sufficient village survived” (ibid: 7).

British colonial conquest first made a radical transformation of the village-system in those parts of the country which were under direct British control. The features of this transformation were: first, private ownership of land was introduced by the creation of landlordism and individual peasant proprietors through Permanent Settlement and Ryotwari system. Second, to make agriculture a part of market-based capitalist economy, land became a commodity to be mortgaged, sold or purchased in the market in exchange of money. To Desai (ibid: 41) this was the “most vital link in the chain of causes which transformed the whole pre-capitalist feudal economy of India into the existing capitalist economy.” Privatisation of land connected the individual owner directly to the new colonial state for maintaining his ownership over land and fulfilment of financial obligations. The revolution in the existing land system eliminated once and for all the productive and distributive functions of the village and transformed India into a single economic unit by the introduction of the capitalist forces of production. Third, commercialisation of agriculture was achieved by making production market-oriented rather than for local consumption. Peasants were encouraged to cultivate cash crops which could be sold in the international market, thereby establishing a link between Indian agriculture and the international market. Consequently, more production of cash crops led to the neglect of food crops whereby the production of the latter became insufficient and the peasant had to buy it from the market. Such agricultural policies had two effects. Negatively, “competitive
economic relations resulting out of private property and market replaced former cooperative socio-economic relations” (ibid: 47). But positively, the narrow, culturally poor, unprogressive and passive lifestyle of the village could be eliminated to transcend the village outlook and consciousness in order to evolve higher forms of economy and social collaboration. As Desai observes, “It became the material premise for the emergence of the Indian nation out of the amorphous mass of the Indian people” living “in the hermetically sealed village” (ibid: 49).

So far as the native Indian states were concerned the British did not initiate any major reorganisation though the agrarian economy there was even more backward than in British India. However, in these states there already existed a class of guaranteed landholders known variously as ‘Jagirdhar’ in southern Maratha states, ‘Thakurs’ in Rajputana states, ‘Mulgirassias’ and ‘Bhayats’ in Kathiawar states, etc. “These are,” says Desai, “the privileged classes, and their lands and holdings are guaranteed by the British government” (1938:21).

The pre-British industrial sector included both the town handicrafts as well as the village artisans. Whereas the latter supplied the small village community, the former, instead of producing articles of daily use for the common people, produced almost exclusively “luxury articles for the aristocratic and wealthy strata of society, Indian as well as foreign” (Desai 1981:15). Colonial rule dealt a severe blow to the native industrial sector in various ways. For instance, the decline and disappearance of a number of native princely states had affected the town handicrafts adversely and directly as these native courts were their biggest customers. Again, the English East India Company used its political power to establish a monopoly position for British traders in matters like control over artisans and craftsmen, acquisition of commodities at cheaper prices, ouster of rival traders, both foreign and native, by unfavourable customs and transit measures. All these measures, in Desai’s opinion (ibid: 82) were
adopted with the view of "giving protection to the rising English manufacturers which still could not compete with Indian goods." Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution necessitated the destruction of India's export trade—hence, India from being a quality-goods producer became a major hinterland to supply raw materials in order to further the British industrial efforts. The space vacated due to the collapse of Indian industry was quickly captured by British manufacturers who brought in the forces of modern industries and trade. It was another method of uniting the people "within the web of a system of exchange relations. It thus contributed to the building of the material basis for the...integration of the Indian people into a nation" (ibid: 90).

India's industrial efforts during the colonial period were wholly oriented towards the purpose of benefiting, substantiating and enriching British industrial efforts because a colonial economy is always made "subservient to the interests of imperial economy..." (ibid: 117). Thus, in spite of modernisation of her industries in the 1930s, The Economist, Indian Supplement (ibid: 111) was of the opinion that "...it can hardly be said that she is as yet being 'industrialized'." Even, says Desai, "...the modern means of transport were established and extended not from the point of view of the free, normal, all-sided development of...the Indian nation, but primarily to serve the economic, political and military interests of British in India" (ibid: 129).

However, such developments paved the way for the consolidation of a unified national economy and better socio-cultural integration of the Indian people. Introduction of capitalist economic forms and penetration of the countryside by commercial forces was aided by the spread of western education in India. British efforts for this purpose had certain objectives. First, the Christian missionaries imparted western education to 'christianize'—a variant of cultural colonisation—the Indians as part of the mission to 'civilize' them. Second, the efforts of certain enlightened British statesmen and leaders of English thought like Cecil Rhodes, Mountstuart, Elphinstone, Macaulay, etc,
were similar to the former. For the latter "an almost fanatical belief in the role of
Britain as the Messiah to civilize and unify the world by a world-scale
dissemination of British culture prompted the introduction of modern
education in India" (ibid: 141). The most important impetus for the spread of
western education in India came from the colonial state itself, ostensibly for the
purpose of spreading the rationalist-scientific doctrines of Enlightenment. Desai,
however, thinks otherwise, because to him the main purpose appeared to be the
staffing of the huge administrative machinery. The government-controlled
"educational institutions provided clerks for the government and commercial
offices, lawyers versed in the structure and processes of the new legal system,
doctors trained in the modern medical science, technicians and teachers" (ibid:
140). Hence, the whole endeavour for the spread of western education in India
had two basic objectives. On the one hand, it created the necessary educated
labour for the politico-administrative apparatus; on the other hand, it tried to
create a subservient educated class which would itself gladly accept and inspire
others to imbibe the 'anglicized' culture and civilisation, thereby strengthening
the foundations of British colonialism.

The final structural transformation occurred through the transformation
of the geographical unity of the subcontinent and the religio-cultural unity of
the Hindus by the politico-administrative unification of parts of the country
which came to be known as British India. The State became centralised and all-
pervading, customary law was replaced by a uniform reign of law, hierarchically
graded public services were established and the de-facto juridico-administrative
bodies of the villages disappeared in the face of administrative officials of the
colonial state, accountable and responsible to the same.

However, the process of structural unification remained incomplete with
nearly one-third of the area of the subcontinent being retained by British
patronised native Princes. Also the region under British India was brought
under the central authority at different times and under different
circumstances, terms and conditions. Such structural-functional transformations ushered in new types of polity and economy, connected to the capitalist world system. In the process it totally destabilised and destroyed the prevailing pre-colonial system. One of the most important implications of this unification was the process of bureaucratisation whereby the nature of power over society and methods of wielding it came to be transformed from rulership to administration. The nationalist movement, thus, aimed not "at the resuscitation of the self-governing village and the general political and administrative disunity of pre-British feudal India" but "desired to retain the political and administrative unification of India, accomplished by the British, which represented a historical advance of Indian society" (ibid: 172-73). Furthermore, politico-administrative unification was aided by the physical linking of the country by various communication networks. Although their development was skewed and lopsided as they were primarily intended to serve the purposes of imperialism, they laid the foundations for spatial mobility as a possible prelude to social mobility.

Hence, it cannot be denied that whatever had been the purpose of the colonial ruler, colonialism unified the people more comprehensively and effectively as never before. Says Desai "...it should not be forgotten...that British rule, though indeed for its selfish interest, unconsciously inaugurated a qualitative structural transformation which hitched the Indian society to a new path. For Indian society there was no going back after freedom" (ibid: VIII).