Chapter – II

Debates on Nationalism in Modern India

Unlike Europe, nationalism in Asia and Africa has been the fallout of anti-colonialism and all the paraphernalia it introduced into the Afro-Asian worlds. There is little, one might admit without evoking Orientalist recriminations, which Afro-Asian nationalisms had to add to the general theories and forms of nationalisms except probably with some peculiar methodic tools of national movements. In Africa, according to P.D. Curtin, there were tribal or “national” groups possessing a strong sense of ethnic and cultural unity. However, the pattern of colonial conquest and settlement seemingly cut across these pre-existing unities and the states that were carved out came to reflect little homogeneity. When nationalism emerged in colonial Africa, argues Curtin, Africans willingly accepted the colonial territorial framework, emphasizing their right to self-determination and political freedom and sacrificing their cultural and ethnic unities.

In other words, nationalism in Africa developed within the framework provided by Western colonialism. This view is also echoed by Rotberg, not only in relation to what happened in Africa but also in Asia. In India, for example, Rotberg claims that it was Britain which “provided the first common, ‘national’, government...first common measure of internal security...common communications, laws, and – although this is debatable – a common language. It unified India physically and, of perhaps the greatest relevance, gave Indians common aspirations and a sense of common destiny.”

Although colonial nationalism is not sui generis, and in reality must be seen as part of a universal phenomenon, yet the association of nationalism with colonialism has been unfortunate and has surely become a fertile source of ambiguity and debate. Part of the ambiguity stems from the belief that “nationalism” is really anti-colonialism. As Smith is at some pains to point out, such a view is misleading and tends to paint nationalism in purely negative colors. Nationalism is simply equated with ‘resistance to outside rule’ and ‘the rejection of standards imposed from outside’. Smith argues that such a portrayal ignores the positive aspect of nationalism, notably the aim of creating “a new type of political and social entity, with arrangements well adapted to the local mores and environments.”

The pairing of nationalism with anticolonialism has also given rise to a more perplexing kind of ambiguity, namely that anticolonialism in any form or guise is a manifestation of nationalism. The prominent schools of writings on African and Asian nationalism subscribes to this viewpoint. To take the case of Vietnamese nationalism, for example, Truong Buu Lam has pleaded for more encompassing definition. He asserts that the Vietnamese people even before the nineteenth century were “already a nation” and that foreign intervention, whether Chinese or French, had led to nationalist resistance in which “the Vietnamese rose to defend their nation’s right to survive as an independent country”. David Marr, however, takes a different position, restricting the use of the term
nationalism only to describe such movements in Vietnam that demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of the concept of the nation-state and which had attained a mass character.

In evaluating the merits of these rival conceptions of nationalism, it is essential that primacy be given to the particular goals that inspired groups or movements to act in opposition to the colonial situation in Asia and Africa. It is generally acknowledged by all scholars that colonialism in these two continents gave rise to a variety of responses. Some were motivated by a desire to revive a lost dynasty or kingdom; some sought to preserve the purity of the ethnic group of religious doctrine from contamination by alien influences; some wanted remedies to specific economic and social ills; and some set their sights upon the establishment of the nation-state and achieving equality of status with other nations. Evidently all these responses are manifestations of anticolonialism: that is to say, they all claim to act in opposition to the existing colonial situation. However it is clear that these differing responses to colonialism otherwise shared little in common in the kind of goals that they pursued. Since nationalism is linked intimately with the objective of creating the nation-state or maintaining the one that already exists, it is difficult to know how anticolonial movements which did not espouse this goal can be grouped under the rubric of nationalism. To elaborate more upon this, while it is true to portray nationalism in colonial Asia and Africa as anticolonialism, yet it will be wrong to invert it and claim that anticolonialism in all guises is nationalism. This is to say that anticolonialism is conceptually a narrower concept than nationalism of which it forms a part, for instance, it is likely that many of anticolonial movements may not be national in spirit and contrarily might be only regional in spirit or a repertoire of regional forces as appears to be the case of 1857 sepoy rebellion.

Nationalism in India as elsewhere was a modern phenomenon, predicated in the belief that India was a nation and that freedom from colonial rule was a birthright of its people and that its conferment would allow the nation to occupy a status of equality with other members in the family of nations. Obviously, nationalism in India was not sui generis; it was part of a universal phenomenon that had swept the world in recent times under different circumstances. In the case of India, her status as a British colony meant that nationalism must necessarily assume an anticolonial garb. The dissolution of British imperialism was a necessary condition in the creation of an Indian nation-state. It is this commitment to the dual objectives of the dissolution of British colonialism and the establishment of the Indian nation-state in its place that separates nationalism (Indian national movements) from its older versions of other anticolonial movements in India, be they the primary resistance struggles mounted by the Indian rulers anxious to recover their lost kingdoms, the religiously inspired wars fought in the name of doctrinal purity, the agrarian outbursts of the peasantry nursing socio-economic grievances or even the Mutiny-Revolt of 1857 instigated primarily by military elements in order to protect their cultural identity.

Emphasizing on the distinctive component of ‘Third-World Nationalism’, Partha Chatterjee has argued, against Gellner and Anderson, that their understanding of nationalism converges, despite important differences, on a kind of sociological
determinism whereby third-world nationalisms are reduced to mere copies of the ‘original’, European ones – of ‘modular’ character, in Anderson’s own phrase. If nations are to be imagined by the styles in which they are imagined, then, strictly speaking, this insistence on the ‘modular’ character of third-world nationalisms, leaves little by which they can be distinguished, according to Chatterjee. Anderson is, of course, the most sophisticated of the whole lot of theorists of nationalism, but he too, says Chatterjee, seems to share the opinion of others like John Plamenatz, Hans Kohn, Elie Kedourie, and Ernest Gellner in this regard. The burden of Chatterjee’s argument is that by confining the discussion to the ‘modular character of twentieth century nationalisms’ Anderson fails to notice “the twists and turns, the suppressed possibilities, the contradictions still unresolved” in the histories of these nationalisms (Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 1986, 21).

One point of definitional significance relating to Indian nationalism needs some elucidation, namely the validity or otherwise of the claim to nationhood by the Muslim minority in the subcontinent. The fact that Muslims were widely dispersed all over the subcontinent, and were living amidst Hindus, Sikhs and other communities in close physical proximity, had raised doubts about whether a Muslim nation-state could be territorially demarcated which would be coextensive with the Hindu nation. Equally, as Muslim nationalism implied the territorial division of the subcontinent, threatening in the process to disrupt centralized colonial state, it was believed that such a division would shatter the very bonds of unity upon which the new nation-state would depend for its survival. Although these objections have some relevance, yet they in themselves do not invalidate the Muslim claim for nationhood as Muslim nationalism fulfilled all the qualifications – be it the issue of territory or that of collective ‘will’ to form a ‘nation’ – required for a territorial nation-state. Besides the generally acknowledged fact that India’s Muslims possessed a distinct identity based upon Islamic values, and this was evidenced in their studied refusal to identify with the Hindus in the Congress, what is also crucial is that the Muslim constituted the majority of the population in the northwest and the northeast and as such were in a position to claim these areas as their territory and homeland. It was the presence of these two factors that made Pakistan a reality in 1947.

Hugh Tinker in his essay ‘Nation-State in Asia’ cites an interesting passage from E. M. Foster’s ‘A Passage to India’ – “India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth century sisterhood! Waddling in at this hour of the world to take her seat! She, whose only peer was the Holy Roman Empire, she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps!” (See Hugh Tinker, ‘The Nation-State in Asia’ in “Nation-State” edited by L. Tivey, 1981, 104). This passage by Forster sets another example of a stereotypical image of Asian countries like India maintained constantly during the colonial period by the Euro-centric and Orientalist European thinkers which specifically emphasizes here that India’s future would only be confused and distorted by an anti-colonialist insistence and that it would eventually land up into a small nation-state on European model.

Almost a century has passed since Indian nationalism has been studied, and despite the remarkable acceleration of research in recent years, there is still a conspicuous absence of
agreement on basic issues relating to this important epiphenomenon in Indian history. In fact the approaches to the study of Indian nationalism are so diverse, and the explanations of its origins so varied, that a scholar might be forgiven if he finds himself lost in a maze of conflicting interpretations. This is not to imply that the complexity of Indian nationalism could not be reduced to the simpler logical conclusions.

**Early Discourses on Indian Nationalism:**

Among the early Romantic accounts to appear on Indian nationalism is Annie Besant’s ‘How India Wrought for Freedom?’ Published in 1915, at a time when the Indian nationalist scene was in the throes of rapid change with the passing of the old leadership, the work was intended as much as a contribution to the understanding of Indian nationalism as a kind of political testament of a renowned Irish political activist who had graduated from early involvement in socialism and Fabianism in Britain to Theosophy and Hindu revivalism in India. At the time that the book appeared, Besant, after two decades in the service of Hindu revival, was offering herself as a leader of the Indian nationalist movement, acting as a conciliator of the warring factions inside the Congress and busy in the formation of Home Rule Leagues. It is thus not surprising that Besant’s study reveals to some extent how her preoccupations with Theosophy and Hindu revivalism influenced her perception of Indian nationalism. Besant insists that Indians had not only the capacity and knowledge to tackle their problems but also that Britain as the imperial power had turned traitor to her great ideals and principles. In writing the history of Indian nationalism, she hopes that the British nation would “understand the shame of autocratic rule in India, her broken pledges, her selfishness, her preference for her own to India’s interests” and thus pave the way for the early grant of self-rule to the Indian people.

While the history of the Congress forms the focus of study, Besant’s account of its origins takes her into an investigation of the early history of India for she believes that the beginnings of national consciousness are deeply embedded in its ancient past, notably the civilization nurtured by the Aryans. The Aryan civilization is depicted as the true breeding ground of Indian nationality. On the one hand, there was the proud literary heritage which fostered legends, traditions, drama and songs which “live still more vitally in Indian hearts and prayers and ceremonies today.” Besant argues that it is “on this literature and on the past embodied in it that the foundation of Indian nationality is indestructibly laid.” On the other hand, religion came to consolidate further this sense of unity and consciousness. To Besant, the people in mentioning their pilgrimages “knew them as their Motherland”. It was further proof that “India was a unity” and possessed “national consciousness in her religion”. Besant is thus led to conclude that Indian national consciousness was “not a plant of mushroom growth, but a giant of the forest, with millennia behind it.” Denied implicitly here is that nationalism is a modern phenomenon of European origin. All that Besant is willing to concede is that the national unity imposed by the Aryan civilization was to an extent disrupted by the advent of Islam which introduced new material into Indian polity that was yet to be wholly assimilated.
"Indians, Persians (Parsis), and Musalmans are not yet wholly one nation, though becoming one with great rapidity."

Although Besant denies any British part in sowing the seeds of nationalism in India, yet she believes that British policy could become an important factor in its development. Besant argues that in certain areas, notably education, British rule had done much to strengthen nationalist feeling in India and prepare the country for self-government. On balance, however, she finds the record of British imperialism in India a dismal one. Besant’s version reflects what may be termed as the “romantic” school of Indian nationalism which the Theosophical Society and other Hindu bodies had done so much to popularize since the nineteenth century. This school of Indian historical writing started on the premise that India, as the inheritor of an ancient and glorious civilization, owed little to discoveries made by other civilizations, whether European or otherwise. It thus followed that nationalism was not in reality a European invention, as some writers had claimed, but a phenomenon that had long been embedded in Hindu culture. While Besant’s version of Indian nationalism may be important to instill a sense of national pride to a people under colonial sujegation, it does however little to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of important historical processes like nationalism. In failing to see nationalism as a product of modern history, Besant has ruled out any prospect of coming to grips with the particular set of circumstances that gave rise to this phenomenon in India.

Roy and the Perspective of Historical Materialism:

A different perspective of Indian nationalism is gained from the writings of Manabendra Nath Roy, the founder of the Indian Communist movement and without doubt its leading theoretician during the 1920s. It must be admitted at once that Roy did not specifically address himself to the task of writing the history of Indian nationalism. Essentially he viewed Indian nationalism as a process within the country’s broader historical evolution. Although Roy has written extensively on a variety of issues over a period of time, yet a reasonably clear insight into Roy’s perspective of Indian nationalism can be gained through a scrutiny of his first study published in 1922 entitled India in Transition. What is of some significance about this work is that it was written at a time when Roy was in the full flesh of conversion to communism and held fervently to the belief that this ideology was destined to achieve its global triumph.

Roy states at the outset of his study that his analysis proceeds from “the point of view of Historical Materialism”. Applying the techniques of Marxist analysis, Roy traces India’s historical evolution from the beginning to modern times. However little space is devoted to developments in the pre-British periods, for Roy’s main concern lies with the dual processes of how India was simultaneously struggling to free herself from foreign rule and at the same time seeking to destroy many of her old institutions which were obstructive to her social progress. In other words, Roy seeks to depict the revolt which
would usher the people of India “into a more advanced stage of socio-economic development”. It is this revolt that he terms as “the essence of the present transition”.

Roy denies vehemently the claims of the Romantic School that Indian nationalism originated in ancient times. To him, the historians of this school misguided the readers of history whose “subjective attitude prevents them from looking at the history of human progress as it is”. To Roy, nationhood was “a comparatively recent phenomenon in the annals of human history”. Nations were born at a certain stage of economic development when people in a given area were welded together into a national entity. Specifically it is the development of a mode of production that brings into existence the bourgeoisie that provided the conditions for the rise of nationalism. This class, argues Roy, anxious to obtain power in order to control the means of production and distribution, originated the theory of nationhood in an attempt to rally the support of other classes. India did not inherit a bourgeoisie before the eighteenth century and as such the concept of nationhood was unknown at that time. India during the days of Hindu and Muslim rule was “a mere geographical expression”. Hindu kingdoms that rose were theocratic and patricidal in nature, and what motivated them was “dynastic ambition, pure and simple”. Under Muslim rule, although India was brought under one central rule, it was “not a nation – because the court of Delhi was not the centre of a national state”. India was ruled by a foreign aristocracy with the help of a mercenary army. However Roy does admit that the rise of Maratha power in the seventeenth century marked “the first stage of political nationalism in the history of India” but he claims that it soon degenerated into “medieval imperialism” propagating “a reactionary cult” based on Hindu antagonism towards the Muslim.

It was only with the advent of British imperialism that the necessary objective conditions for the rise of Indian nationalism were truly laid. Roy argues that feudalism “as the basis of social economics received the first death blow” with British victories in the middle of the eighteenth century, and during the next century, it was progressively weakened, with “the last vestiges of feudal power shattered by the failure of the revolt of 1857”. India thus passed under “the capitalist exploitation” of the British. Roy claims that this change from Indian feudalism to capitalism was made possible partly through the active support given to the British by the Indian middle class – intellectuals and traders – which had reared its head during the eighteenth century. The middle class, being conscious that the decaying feudal order was inimical to its material interest, was willing to collaborate with a foreign bourgeoisie in order to establish a more advanced economic system. The British rulers in acknowledgement of this support gave the middle class opportunities to trade, invest in land, and to acquire modern education and professional skills. Especially significant was the introduction of modern secular education. Roy contends that the British permitted the new learning on the belief that its products would be their natural ally and oppose any “reactionary upheavals”. However, the result turned out to be quite different, for modern education was to let loose “that dynamic social force which was destined to prove eventually mortal to the British”. Not only did the Indian intellectual class showed “signs of vigor in social and religious reformism”, but more significant its members also became “the forerunners of Indian nationalism” who worked to bring about the dissolution of British imperialism.
Roy explains that what prompted the Indian intellectuals to espouse nationalism was their desire to foster their class interest. The intellectuals, together with the landowners and traders, formed the Indian bourgeoisie which had benefited from India’s transition to a capitalist system. However, the continued growth of this class posed a threat to the ruling power. The British bourgeoisie recognized that the ambitions of its Indian counterpart to expand into industrial and administrative fields were “positively dangerous to the safety of the foreign domination”, and as such ought to be checked, even if it meant the destruction of this class. The British rulers then sought allies amongst the feudal elements in society and also promulgated restrictive measures to contain the bourgeoisie. Acts of economic discrimination saw the bourgeoisie being “excluded from building railways, tramways, exploiting mines and others”. Roy claims that the difficulties of the Indian bourgeoisie were compounded by the falling income from land, shortage of productive land for exploitation and the overcrowding of the liberal professions. It was a situation in which the “rich intelligentsia found its further economic development blocked on all sides. The British Government was seen to be the cause of all this, and there arose the necessity to fight against it. Economic necessity forced the intellectual bourgeoisie to begin a political struggle, which was initiated in the form of the Indian National Congress”. Indian intellectuals found allies among the traders and the industrialists resentful of British obstructiveness. Roy argues that Indian capitalism “represented by the liberal professions and landholding class, and the Indian merchants and traders” had launched nationalism to curtail British power which stood in the way of its further economic advancement.

The ideology of nationalism, claims Roy, was borrowed from the British bourgeoisie and it aimed at the creation of “a bourgeois national state”. The Indian intelligentsia and capitalists who were in the vanguard of this movement proclaimed that “the sovereign power is not vested in an individual but in the entire community united into a nation”. Roy asserts that these groups raised issues such as representative institutions, Indianisation of the civil service, the development of home industry and the boycott of foreign goods. Although these demands were “clothed in the language of the democratic scriptures of ‘national will’, ‘sovereign prerogative of the people,’ etc”, Roy believes that this was a clever piece of deception. “The grievances of the office-seeking intellectuals were put forth as those of the people. The ambitions of the native capitalist class were identified with the right of the people”. In reality, the bourgeoisie was “shielding its exploitation under the cry against foreign imperialism”. The same self-interest determined the attitude of this class towards social and religious conservatism. Although Roy admits that this programme was not without its revolutionary significance, yet the action of the bourgeoisie was founded on the secure belief that a state conducive to the growth of the bourgeoisie could not be built on feudal social relations and religious conservatism. Roy is thus led to conclude that victory for Indian nationalism would signify no more than “the victory of the progressive middle class”.

Integral to this analysis is the belief that the nationalism of the Congress would do little to alter the condition of the masses. Although India was essentially an agrarian society, with more than two-thirds of the people dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, Roy
contends British rule had done little to advance the welfare of this class. Changes in system of leadership, introduction of cash crops for foreign market, import of cheap machine-produced goods into India, and the general play of free market forces had all combined to produce a pauperized peasantry and agricultural workers. Roy contends that the beneficiaries of these changes were the government, the Zamindars and the land speculators, none of whom ploughed back their profits to increase agricultural productivity. Clearly, there was conflict of interest between these profiteers and the masses of toiling peasantry, and Roy believes that it was this situation that was productive of a future revolution in India. To Roy, Gandhi represented “the acutest and most desperate manifestation of the forces of reaction” and as such bound to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. The day was not far away when the masses would divorce themselves from the bourgeoisie leadership, organize to fight “on the grounds of class struggle”, and eventually secure “ultimate economic and social liberation” of India.5

Roy’s analysis of Indian nationalism reveals none of the conceptual fuzziness that so much besets the approaches of the romantic school. Roy perceives nationalism as a modern phenomenon born from conditions created by British rule, notably changes in the economy and education, which he argues created a middle class in Indian society that eventually became the leading exponents of the doctrine of nationalism. Where Roy’s analysis does cause disagreement is the extent to which he relies on Marx’s materialist conception of history to explain the phenomenon of Indian nationalism. Claims by the leaders of the Congress to articulate “the national will” or assert “the prerogatives of the people” are depicted by Roy as deception on the part of the bourgeoisie to hide its real goals and delude the masses into supporting the so-called nationalist cause. While such a view has not only been regarded as an orthodoxy among Marxist historians but also drawn fire from other scholarly circles who see such a portrayal of Indian nationalism as simplistic, reducing a complex movement into the straight jacket of Marxist class struggle, and denying causal significance to non-economic factors.6

Mccully and the Theory of the Educated Class:

Unlike Besant and Roy, whose interest in Indian nationalism was stimulated through personal participation in it, B.T.Mccully can claim no similar involvement. He came to the subject as a scholar working for a degree in an American university. In 1940 Mccully’s research findings were incorporated and published in a monograph called English Education and the Origins of Indian nationalism. The author claims that nationalism was a global phenomenon which had touched all peoples and states. India was no exception and, although this was recognized by all, yet scholars and publicists who had studied it had left many things still unexplained. In his work, Mccully seeks to discover from whence nationalism came to India, whether it constituted an opposition to the cultural and political penetration of Europe, and which groups in Indian society were its active disseminators. In other words, the writer addressed himself to the problem of causation of Indian nationalism.
McCully conceives English education as the agency through which nationalism entered India. Government patronage, combined with missionary zeal and private enterprise, had helped to produce “the educated class” in India. Numbering over 55,000 at the time of the formation of the Congress in 1885, this minority “instructed in the literature, science and history of Europe” was essentially upper-caste Hindu in composition, drawn from “the middle and lower income groups” residing in the presidency capitals and district towns, and sought employment in government and liberal professions. McCully maintains that it was the resentments and aspirations of this educated class that led to the germination of the seed of nationalism in India. The resentments of the educated were partly economic in nature. Unemployment among this class had “become chronic” by the 1880s. However, there were no outlets in politics or military service to speak of; agriculture “offered little temptation” while openings in manufacturing and commerce were “almost impossible for lack of skill, dearth of capital, and the inequality of terms on which it had to compete with European industry”; and the higher echelons of the civil service were for “all practical purposes” closed. These difficulties were aggravated by the baneful working of the new economic forces associated with British rule – money-economy, population growth, shortage of land, and rise in prices of agricultural products. It was in the face of such economic plight that the educated demanded that more jobs be made available in the government. When this demand was contemptuously rejected by the British bureaucracy, argues McCully, it “furnished no little fuel for the nationalist agitation” (McCully, 1940).

The problems of the educated can also be traced to another quarter. McCully argues that through English education, Indians came to exhibit “numerous traces of the exotic cultural influences to which their schooling had exposed them”. There was a conscious imitation of European styles of dress and eating habits, the ready acceptance of alien ideas, and the consequent repudiation of long cherished beliefs and customs. The habitual use of English as the language of group communication also alienated the educated from the rest of the society. McCully claims that the extent of disruption was so serious that the educated became “an anomaly in native society” which had “slipped its moorings and was drifting from the old anchorage”. When a small section of the educated began attacking venerated traditions in the name of reform and progress, it precipitated a conflict inside Indian society. Social tension born from cultural alienation, coupled with economic distress, were the activating factors which led the educated to experiment with nationalism.

McCully asserts that in choosing nationalism as the ideology of its struggle, the educated reflected its close contact with European culture. Nationalism in the true sense of the word was unknown in India before; nor did the different language groups that inhabited the subcontinent show any sense of national unity. What did exist before, maintains McCully, was a form of Hindu patriotism which manifested itself in “parochial loyalties, a fond attachment to the natal spot, an interest in the local affairs of the village, a sentimental attachment to the ancestral religion and manners”. In espousing nationalism, the educated broke with tradition, and began to improvise “with the aid of European example”. European ideas such as freedom, liberty and common citizenship were imbibed by the educated through study of European history, by following press reports of happenings in the West, and through visits to Europe for business and study. Similarly, in
the sphere of tactics and organization, the educated imitated “Young Italy”, British political parties and the Irish nationalists. Mccully thus concludes that the emergence of Indian nationalism was “largely the outgrowth of British rule and English education”.

Mccully further observes that the feeling of class solidarity was built by slowly dissolving the ties of provincialism and caste exclusiveness. Instead, the educated now developed a feeling of its own superiority, cultivating “the sentiments of the highest caste”. The uneducated was “looked down upon as unworthy of the company and association of their intellectual superiors”; there was also “a strong repugnance for the lowest trades and callings”. Mccully maintains that it was this “hard, basic substratum of class consciousness” that gave the educated its identity and the motivation to fight against the British rulers. By identifying the grievances of the people and by mastering the techniques of modern journalism, Mccully claims, the educated gained a “psychological hold upon the masses”. To Mccully then, Indian nationalism “did not germinate on its own accord” but was “an exotic growth implanted by foreign hands and influences”. Of particular significance in the genesis of nationalism was the role of English education which created a distinct class that was capable of transcending linguistic and caste differences. Mccully claims that no other agency could have played a similar role. “Certainly not religion, not indigenous learning, not the traditional form of social organization, nor all three could have done so.”

The value of Mccully’s analysis lies in part in his clear comprehension of the nature of the phenomenon. He sees nationalism as a modern phenomenon that did not occur in pre-colonial India. Unlike Besant, he does not confuse nationalism with ethnocentrism. He has also conceptually separated nationalism from traditional resistance movements like the Mutiny-Revolt of 1857-58. Mccully’s analysis however is not free from certain ambiguities. He seemingly endorses Roy’s belief that Indian nationalism was basically a function of class interest. In so doing he denies the claims of the educated to be motivated by such ideas as freedom, sovereignty, democracy or fundamental rights. It appears that such ideas are no more than handy slogans to disguise the true designs of the educated and enlist mass support through deception. This raises the thorny question of what actually motivates group action. Mannheim has argued that ideas must be seen in terms of social situation and experience of the believers so as to comprehend their true meaning. He takes issue with Marx for dismissing a system of ideas based on different experience to one’s own situation as subterfuge or even foolish. Mccully has produced weighty evidence in support of his view, but whether he has really considered the social situation and the experience of the educated in totality needs a further reexamination. There is also a more fundamental criticism of Mccully’s explanation of nationalism. In considering English education as crucial determinant of the genesis of Indian nationalism, the writer has seemingly overlooked the role of the economic factor. The advent of British rule in India was characterized by a series of changes in the structure of Indian economy, including the recognition of the concept of private property, the expansion of internal and international trade, the greater use of cash system of payment, the introduction of the modern industry replacing the old handicrafts and so on. An important consequence of these changes was the rise of an Indian capitalist class which had amassed wealth, became influential in society, and had quickly learned the art of
defending its interest through novel forms of organization and agitation. That this element provided one of the activating forces of the Indian nationalist movement is now widely acknowledged. The weakness of McCully's approach is that he has not integrated the role of this group into his general explanation of the emergence of Indian nationalism.

**Seal and the Theory of Group Competition:**

A testimony to the recent intensification of scholarly interest in Indian nationalism is Anil Seal's *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Originally submitted for a degree in the University of Cambridge, it appeared in published form in 1968 at a time when much of the excitement and controversy engendered by that movement had almost completely subsided. The author states that the study is the first of the projected series of five volumes in which he and his associates in Cambridge "will examine the history of political change in South Asia from the 1870s to the 1940s". It is thus part of an ambitious project by a group of British scholars to provide a comprehensive portrayal of a movement that had impinged so deeply on the recent history of Britain and the Indian subcontinent.

In this work Seal is concerned with the processes that led to the emergence of Indian nationalism during the late nineteenth century. In order to elucidate these processes, he had "to concentrate upon Indian educated in Western mode" because it is the resentments and ambitions of this group that supplied the impulse towards the all-India movement. Since he finds that the educated came mainly from the Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras, Seal's attention is drawn towards developments in these three Presidencies. He specifically addresses himself to discover who the educated were, what were their relations with other groups in society, and what impelled them "to form their associations and from there to work towards a unified political demand" which culminated in the foundation of the Congress. Seal argues that education made its most rapid strides in the coastal Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras because it was here that the impact of British rule "had worked much longer and gone much deeper than in those up-country provinces which had been organized during the nineteenth century". Not only had the government invested more in education in these three Presidencies but there was also more concerted private endeavor as well which placed these areas considerably ahead of the other provinces. Seal concludes that among the factors causing great unevenness in Indian development, "the distribution of Western education was among the most conspicuous, and the balance was tilted overwhelmingly in favor of the Presidencies".

There was the same unevenness in the response to education among the various groups that inhabited these Presidencies. To Seal, the Presidencies were "no more than administrative expressions", reflecting the same linguistic, religious and social diversity of the continent. In his educational surveys, Seal finds that in Bengal it was the bhadralok that had outstripped all other groups, in Bombay it was the Mahratta Brahmins and Parsis, and in Madras it was the Tamil Brahmins and to a lesser extent the Telugu Brahmins. These groups had taken to education "not so much on enthusiasm for the cultural tidings about empiricism and induction as calculation of the material benefits that might accrue from learning the ways of the new rulers". Education, maintains Seal, was
“a vital weapon in the effort either to conserve or to improve status” in a society characterized by intense inter-group competition. In Bengal, for instance, the bhadralok was the social and landowning elite which looked down upon the rest of the society which it exploited. The same was true of the Brahmins of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu where a deep gulf separated them from other castes and communities.

Given the strong pre-existing conflicts, which were now aggravated by the uneven pace of development between different groups and regions, Seal maintains “there was little possibility of unity between the graduates and their societies”. In other words, national unity of the educated minority and the unlettered masses in common opposition to alien rule was impossibility. However, the writer claims there was one level at which the educated elites from the three Presidencies could work together, namely “the level of all-India”, and in so doing their “main purpose may well have been to strengthen their position inside their local societies”. Seal substantiates his claim by pointing out that at the time that the educated were moving towards all-India politics “competition grew sharper between castes and communities” and found expression in the formation of parochial bodies. In organizing at an all India level, the writer reasons, the educated were merely resorting to a new technique to defend their old primacy. The educated in India by virtue of its training had come to acquire not only common skills and functions but also harbored common hopes and resentments. To Seal, the hopes and fears of the educated were “concerned with the chances of gaining employment at what they thought was the right level”. Since there were no openings to speak of in the army, business or agriculture, he asserts that the educated turned to the administration and the professions. While entry into the professions was governed by educational attainment, in the administration there was also the added complication of government policy. Although in theory all positions in the administration were open to Indians, Seal claims that in practice there were many difficulties. This was particularly the case of the prestigious covenanted service where places were few and competitors many with the result that failures were high. The writer points out that some of these failures “were the men who were to make their mark in the politics of Indian nationalism”. At the lower levels of administration, although more places existed, they were nonetheless insufficient to absorb all the educated aspirants. The frustration of finding suitable employment, compounded by suspicions about racial discrimination by the British rulers, proved one of the potent forces that drove the educated towards an all-India movement. In the early years, Seal establishes, the educated acted as collaborators with the Raj, but this was “likely to be a conditional bargain. So long as working with government seemed to benefit their regional, caste or communal aspirations, then they would do so. But once the benefits lessened, so too did their pliancy”. According to Seal, it was during the third quarter of the nineteenth century that “a gap began to open up between the Raj and some of its educated subjects” and the collaborators of the past became critics and were moving rapidly towards organizing an all-India movement. In other words, the common ambitions and resentments of educated had brought them to act in national terms within the framework of the British Raj.

Although the educated claimed that their organization, the Congress, was founded as the mouthpiece for India as a whole, Seal denies that it was “India’s national party” but sees
it more as “a ramshackle set of local linkages whose task was to organize an annual tamasha”. He believes that such a loose system of linkages was unavoidable, given the uneven rate of educational development in the country and the uneven level of political organization in the different provinces. Indeed, so frail was the sense of unity that the issue of simultaneous examinations was enough to cause a split with the Muslims. In the light of such localisms founded upon religion and caste, and “the loyalty of the educated to the particular interest”, Seal casts doubt about the oft-repeated view of scholars that Indian nationalism was in effect local mobilizations “directed chiefly against foreign over-lordship”. Instead he sees it as an expression of inter-group rivalry which British rule had done so much to intensify through its uneven impact on Indian society.

Integral to Seal’s analysis is the view that the origins of Indian nationalism were unrelated to changes in the economic sphere. He contends that “British rule signally failed to revitalize the Indian economies”: there was no agrarian revolution to speak of and the condition of the peasantry remained deplorable. However, he does acknowledge that British rule “did inject some dynamism into Indian economies”, partly in the growth of the Presidency cities with their docks, banks and agency houses, and partly in the introduction of new communication networks, industries and cash crops. However these changes had little far-reaching effects, and “not sufficient to give India social classes based on economic categories. Small comprador groups in the Presidency capitals did emerge, but they failed to forge strong links throughout the subcontinent”. Thus it was the educated that were the vanguard of nationalist politics but they were “the products of bureaucratic initiative than of economic change”. Hence, Indian nationalism as it emerged during the 1870s and after “was not formed through the promptings of any class demand or as the consequence of any sharp changes in the structure of the economy”.

What is presented here is a challenging, if controversial, thesis of Indian nationalism as took shape during the late nineteenth century. It is evident that to Seal, as indeed to Roy and Mccully before him, Indian nationalism is a modern phenomenon which, despite reflecting some peculiarities of its environment, shares much in common with nationalist movements in other parts of the world. Nationalism is thus conceptually separated from ethnocentrism as manifested in pre-colonial India. In studying the origins of Indian nationalism, Seal also deliberately omits from consideration what he terms “the confused stirrings of more traditional type of politics”. He claims that anti-British revolts inspired by religious or agrarian issues were “grounded on local grievances and inspirations, and they were all dependent on local leadership”.9 Where Seal’s thesis does present problems is in his efforts to explain the role of the educated in the nationalist movement, he shares Roy’s and Mccully’s view that the involvement of the educated in nationalism was motivated by self-interest. However, unlike Roy and Mccully, Seal seems less inclined to see the educated as a new class, distinguishable from the rest of society, but as extension of the castes from which they originated. Seal claims that since the educated came from certain dominant castes, and since these castes had long been in competition with others to retain their primacy, their involvement in nationalism represented no more than a new device to preserve the interest of their prescriptive group. It is implied that the ideology of Indian nationalism had little to do with its professed claims of freedom for the people or the advancement of common welfare. Like Mccully, Seal has not sought to consider
the totality of the social situation within which the ideology of nationalism was framed. There is also a more serious reservation about the writer’s explanation of the origins of nationalism. Although he acknowledges the existence of the small bourgeoisie, he is of the view that this class was too small in number to play a role in Indian nationalism. Besides Seal appears, in his approach to nationalism, to have been an easy victim of the Orientalist perspectivism of the Cambridge historiography which is not ready to accept that nationalism could emerge in the Third-World countries as a byproduct of industrial revolution or of the economic transformation of the society (from feudal mode of production to industrial mode of production).

A Conclusive Estimation of the Early Discourses:

In examining these various approaches to the study of Indian nationalism, one is struck as much by the differences of views that are expressed as by similarities. While the discussion thus far has tended to dwell more on the differences between these various approaches, it is now appropriate and even profitable to draw attention to those areas where views converge. All writers examined here are seemingly in agreement that nationalism in India was essentially anticolonial in nature and manifestation. Regardless of the groups which started the movement, and irrespective of their actual reasons for doing so, nationalism in India is represented as a challenge to the status quo imposed by the British Raj and sought to bring about its eventual liquidation. Even Seal, while wishing to qualify the prevailing view of a monolithic Indian nationalism in conflict with British imperialism, does concede that those who started it did so in order to express their opposition to British policies. There is thus a measure of agreement that Indian nationalism, for all its internal contradictions and conflicts, constituted the mobilization of anticolonial sentiment found amongst the subject population. Almost all writers of this phase were in agreement that the imposition of British rule had led to the destruction of Indian kingdoms and the virtual loss of Indian sovereignty and everything that went with it. To Besant and many Indian traditionalists, the loss of Indian sovereignty was a body-blows to the dignity, even the sanctity, of Indian life which had long been nurtured by the existence of these indigenous states. To Roy and Seal, on the other hand, the destruction of the Indian kingdoms may not have the same significance. However they do agree with Besant that the sentiment of Indian nationalism was intensified by the British policies of discrimination and repression and this provided the basis for the enlistment of widespread support in the name of nationalism. While agreeing, if only implicitly, that the old ruling elites had virtually fallen through the trapdoors of history, all writers examined here look upon the educated as the rising star in the Indian firmament who would lead India into a new age founded upon closer contacts with European culture. There is general recognition that this new education created a group that was imbued with ideas and ambitions conducive to the growth of nationalism.

A Typology of Nationalism in India:

In light of the discussion made so far it can be deduced that although ‘nationalism in India’ has broadly followed almost the same pattern as West European, especially in terms of industrial establishments making it conducive to the ‘middle-class based civil-
society' to take over into politics by using skillfully the ideology of nationalism; still Indian nationalism managed to preserve its specific autonomous character. Most of the historians of Indian nationalism have lapsed into misreading it to the extent that some of them (e.g. Cambridge Historians) have resorted to characterizing it from the Orientalist point of view, while others from the Revivalist point of view. Whereas the demand of the discourse is to cautiously keep from either of the two extremes and give Indian nationalism its due. Coming to conceptual typology of "nationalism" as an ideology I would never argue that Indian experience of nationalism articulated a separate category of nationalism apart from its 'cultural', 'political' and 'secessionist' versions; but within these universal categories, Indian nationalism, without doubt, introduced its own 'subcategories' and above all its own unique style of maneuvering anti-colonial movements. For instance, within the broader category of "Political nationalism", Indian political nationalism had unique indigenous components, like 'caste', 'Dalit', 'mythical historiography' and above all unique indigenous statesmanships of Gandhi and Ambedkar alongside the westernized Nehru which were for most of the part alien to the world outside. Makarand Paranjape, for instance, would argue that Indian nationalism was quite different from its European predecessors and that it was certainly not a 'derivative discourse'. European nationalism may be said to have two major trajectories. The first, born out of the age of revolutions and of the European Enlightenment, defined the nation as an aggregate of citizens, whose consent to be thus governed defined the nation. The second was the post-enlightenment idea, influenced by the German idealism and Romanticism, of the nation as made up of a Volk, a people with a distinct ethnic, linguistic or cultural identity. Indian ideas of the nation, on the other hand, were characterized by their emphasis on desh or locality, region and territory, jati or birth, tribe, community, and praja or the people, subjects or citizens. Incidentally, the word praja, which M.K.Gandhi often used for the nation, includes in its various meanings both the citizens and the rulers of a state. It is also interesting to note that it is related etymologically to the nation, because of common Indo-European roots. To Paranjape, Indian nationalism was different from European nationalism because the former was born out of a struggle with the latter, or of that extension of the latter which found its way to India as imperialism. An external challenge and threat was thus its first defining feature. Its second defining feature was an internal struggle with its own traditions and social arrangements, the most virulent of which was movement of politico-religious separatism that caused the Partition. Although Paranjape commits the same error, while defining the first feature of Indian nationalism, of identifying every anticolonial movement with national movement; yet the indigenous autonomy of Indian nationalism can not be negated in its entirety.

To make any further advance in the discourse of nationalism, it becomes inevitable at this juncture, to draw a vivid picture of how Indian nationalism typologised itself in the given colonial situations. The typology goes as follows:
A typology of nationalism in India:

![Diagram](image-url)

Bourgeois Nationalism

Left-Wing Nationalism

(a) Cultural Nationalism
(b) Political nationalism
(c) Secessionist nationalism

(1) Hindu nationalism
(2) Difference-sensitive nationalism
(1) Congress nationalism
(1) Muslim (League) nationalism
(2) Sikh nationalism
(3) Tribal nationalism

Bourgeois Nationalism:

I would prefer to call “nationalism” predominantly a ‘bourgeois’ concept primarily because it seeks naturally to establish a geo-political dichotomy between “us” and “them”, “citizens” and “foreigners”, “domestic” and “international” and all this at the expense of ‘universal humanism’. All branches of nationalism irrespective of their geo-political frontiers pursue the same ethics of dichotomizing between the two mutually antagonistic identities resulting into the hordes of wars and other forms of violence. More importantly, nationalism as an ideology, evidence has it, has never been seen to have broken free from the superstructural entrapments of the bourgeois mode of production, which is to say that on economic fronts, nationalism, in every age, gets into collaboration either with some forms of “Liberalism” (Classical, Positive or social) as per the circumstances, or with some forms of “Fascism” and at the same time maintains a conscious distance from “Marxism” and “Anarchism”. To elucidate more upon this, we can take the case of the nationalists in England, as the nineteenth century was a phase of ‘Classical Liberalism’ so the British Parliament in its ‘1832 reforms’ included most of the Benthamite utilitarian recommendations, whereas the same Parliament rebuffed, by late 19th century, J.S. Mill’s recommendations as immature just because the Positive elements of Mill’s ‘Liberalism’ did not suit their ‘need of time’. And the same Parliament and its nationalists of all sorts (Tory, Whig and Labor) after experiencing the “Great Depression” agreed to go Left, in particular after the World War II and continuing in the same fashion, in the post ‘Cold-War’ era even the Labor party takes a ‘Neo-Liberal’ turn.
These facts impel one to arrive at a conclusion that nationalisms of all sorts – whether cultural or political, European or Afro-Asian – sought to remain bourgeois and are quite conspicuous by their conscious effort to avoid the notion of ‘Marxian justice’ of transnational humanity which gets manifested into the doctrine – “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need”. Above all, nationalism can be said to be ideologically ‘bourgeois’ chiefly because it does not distinguish between the oppressed and the oppressor class and gives indiscriminately the same status of citizenship to one and all.

Coming to Indian experience of ‘bourgeois-nationalism’, theoretically, Indian nationalism too followed the same pattern as its European predecessors with its peculiar specificities of-course. As Aijaz Ahmad, emphasizing on the bourgeois character of Indian nationalism, argues that ‘the best but also the worst features of the state that arose out of the crucible of Independence were owed to the fact that the state itself was the product of a class compromise. The class that had ensured the success of Gandhi and his companions was the peasantry, but the peasants were now sent home – demobilized in lieu of a class compromise whereby they got very little land but did get juridic equality (Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Nationalism and Peculiarities of the Indian’, 2007, op. cit., 55). Indian mainstream ‘bourgeois-nationalism’ includes primarily ‘Congress-nationalism’ and ‘Hindu-nationalism’ but even ‘Difference-sensitive nationalism’ is not spared from the ill-effects of ‘bourgeois-Dom’ as it recognizes less of ‘economic inequality’ than of ‘cultural inequality’ and above all, like its other counterparts, ‘Difference-sensitive nationalism’ has little to offer to a man who is not Indian, or a poor man not falling into the prescribed identity of “Dalit” or most significantly, to a “Dalit” who falls short of ‘Reservation benefits’. In India also, initially the ‘official-nationalism’ of Congress and by the late 20th century, Hindu-nationalism have exhibited the same bourgeois traits in their nation-building programmes which “nationalisms” elsewhere have done and this is why they qualify to be the faultless representatives of ‘bourgeois-nationalism’.

(a) Cultural Nationalism/Hindu Nationalism

India is a Nation:

In India, ‘cultural nationalism’ is synonymous with ‘Hindu nationalism’ as no other ‘pan-Indian’ ethno-religious group could emerge either in colonial or post-colonial India to have made a claim to carve out a monochromatic nation out of pointillist and variegated cultures of India. As to the accurate origin of “Hindu nationalism” in India, it is difficult to mark out which particular revivalist organization or personality has pioneered it. But one sure thing is that the proponents of “Hindu nationalism” without any exception would rally behind the idea that India is an organic nation with a monolithic Hindu identity. Roughly speaking, the process of “Hindu-revivalism” in India began with Raja Rammohun Roy, the founder of the ‘Brahmo Samaj’ and generally regarded as the father of Modern India. He postulated that the worship of the idols of
innumerable gods and goddesses had not originally been a part of Hinduism, which had really been based on monotheism. In spite of his ‘Western world-view’, he would become the first of the Revivalists to believe that Muslim rule had caused great damage to Hindu society and culture. ‘Muslim-rule’, he believed, had introduced a tyrannical government destroying temples, universities and all other sacred and literary establishments.  

Another key Hindu-revivalist in mid 19th century was Dwarkanath Tagore who remarked that these evils such as ‘a want of truth’, ‘a want of integrity’ and so on had not existed in India in ancient times, but had emerged as a result of Muslim conquest and the consequent loss of liberty and national degradation. To quote his observation, “The Mohammedans introduced in this country all the vices of an ignorant, intolerant and licentious soldiery. The utter destruction of learning and science was an invariable part of their system, and the conquered no longer able to protect their lives by arms and independence, fell into opposite extremes of abject submission, deceit and fraud. Such has been the condition of the natives of Hindustan for Centuries.”  

Another Hindu revivalist worth mentioning of this age was Swami Dayanand Sarswati, founder of the Arya Samaj and who was also pre-eminently known for his revivalist saying – “Back to the Vedas”. Dayanand asserted that the Vedic religion was superior to all other religions, including Christianity and Islam. At one place in his religious treatise “Satyartha Prakash”, first published in 1875, Dayanand remarks, “He would indeed be a perfect idiot who would believe the Koran to be revealed, Muhammad to be a Prophet and the Mohammedan God to be an omnipotent Lord”. In the same queue comes next the most versatile literary personality of 19th century Bengal, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who was also regarded by many as “the creator of Hindu nationalism”. The following is a good illustration of his general approach to nationalism: “If religion is the source of true happiness, the whole life should be governed by religion. This is the essence of Hindu dharma. Other religions do not say so, that is why they are incomplete, only Hindu religion is the most complete religion. Other people believe that religion is concerned with only God and the life beyond. To the Hindu, religion encompasses this life, the life beyond, God, Man, all living beings, and the whole of creation. Is there any other religion so all-encompassing, so full of bliss, so pure?”  

Although he talked of the need to discard all impurities which had entered the Hindu religion through the centuries, he did not really see any need for reform in the essentials of Hindu religion and instead offered rational justifications for all kinds of faiths and practices, including ‘idol-worship’. He made his most powerful contribution to nationalist lore through his poem Bande Mataram, depicting the motherland virtually as a Hindu goddess. In his essays as well as novels, he uses ‘Hindu’ and ‘Indian’ as synonymous terms, implying that Muslims were aliens. He was followed by a horde of literary nationalists in all vernaculars, for instance, Bhartendu Harischandra, Pratap Narain Mishra and Radha Charan Goswami as the pioneers of modern Hindi literature in mid and late 19th century. Thus, in his poem welcoming the Prince of Wales in 1875, Bhartendu expressed his happiness at the end of ‘centuries of oppression’ by the Muslims through the establishment of ‘British-Rule’ in India and referred to the “wounds in the
heart that were preserved through the presence of the mosque built by Aurangzeb just by
the side of the sacred Vishwanath temple in Varanasi. Mishra shared the same view of
‘Muslim-rule’ in India and described the Muslims as abominably impure mlechchas. A
character in a play entitled “Bharat mein Yavan Raj” (Foreign Rule in India), written by
Goswami thanks the British for freeing the ‘Hindustanis’ from the rule by Muslims who
had been killing cows, desecrating temples and robbing the people.

Prominent Marathi writers of the revivalist camp exhibit a similar attitude towards
Muslims in late 19th century. Thus Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, while writing long essays in
opposition to Lokahitabadi on several points, agrees with the latter that the Hindus had
degenerated because of their tendency to adopt evil Muslim habits such as indolence. Bal
Gangadhar Tilak refers to the destruction of temples undertaken by Muslim invaders and
rulers, and ascribes their success to the prevalence of certain weaknesses among the
Hindus. The rise of the Marathas in the second half of the 17th century is interpreted by
him as a striking example of Hindu resurgence. He also refers to the evil influence of
certain pernicious Muslim customs such as the Purdah and emphasizes that while Hindus
had changed their social outlook for the better in modern times, the Muslim had remained
as fanatical as ever.

Linguistic chauvinism:

The growing community consciousness among the Hindus found a powerful expression
in the demand for the replacement of Urdu by Hindi both as the language of courts and as
the medium of instruction in primary schools of UP. When the Government decided in
1837 to replace Persian by English and the vernacular of a Province, it had decided in
favor of Urdu in the North-Western provinces and Oudh under the impression that it was
the dominant vernacular there. This was, however, not acceptable to large sections of the
Hindu elite, who started a strong agitation in favor of Hindi. The protagonists of the
Hindi movement in the North-Western provinces and Oudh intensified their agitation
after 1881 when Hindi in Devanagari script replaced Urdu in Persian Script as the
language of the courts in Bihar and Central Provinces, as the champions of ‘Hindi
nationalism’ submitted as many as 118 petitions to the Indian Education Commission of
1882. The objective of these petitions was the replacement of Urdu by Hindi as the
medium of instruction in the primary schools. The petitioners of Western provinces
argued that Muslims constituted only about 13 percent of the population of the province;
while the bulk of the people, being Hindus, speak, with few exceptions, Hindi which in
some form or other is their mother tongue. They further argued that even the rural
Muslims used Hindi and not Urdu in conversation, and that the inherent difficulties of
Urdu made it quite unsuitable for mass education in northern India. One of the signatories
of a memorial in support of Hindi was Lala Lajpat Rai who became in due course one of
the most prominent leaders of the Hindu nationalist movement. According to him, the
language controversy provided him his first lesson in ‘Hindu-nationalism’.16
Recent research has established that within fifteen years of its formation in 1877, the Punjab Arya Samaj included among its members quite a large proportion of the Hindu commercial castes (Khatri, Arora and Bania), which virtually monopolized the modern educational institutions and professions and also became the strongest supporters of national as well as provincial political activities in the Punjab. According to Gerald Barrier, the systematic attack on Islam carried on by the preachers of the Arya Samaj, ‘contributed to a more intense level of Hindu-Muslim antagonism and produced a regularized pattern of conflict’. The Arya Samajists, following the methods of religious propaganda adopted by the Christian missionaries, sent a number of preachers to various parts of the Province and published several pamphlets and posters attacking Islam. The organization of “cow protection societies” in the early 1880s, in which the Arya Samajists played a leading role, further aggravated the situation, resulting into as many as fifteen riots in the Punjab over cow-killing and other related matters from 1883 to 1891. Originating from the Punjab, the movement for cow-protection soon engulfed large parts of northern India and became particularly strong in the Bhojpuri speaking areas of UP and Bihar. Along with the movement for the replacement of Urdu by Hindi, the cow-protection movement must be regarded as one of the most powerful manifestations of Hindu resurgence in late nineteenth-century India.

Institutionalization of Hindu-nationalism:

Along with the movements in support of Hindi and cow-protection, there also emerged in the late nineteenth century a clearly-formulated ideology of ‘Hindu-nationalism’ and attempts to set up political organizations in the light of that ideology. To start with the first chain of this institutionalization process, Rajnarain Bose, a member of the Adi Brahmo Samaj and described by many as the “Grandfather of Indian Nationalism”, can be legitimately regarded as the first prophet of institutionalized Hindu-nationalism. In 1866, he founded in Midnapore a society for the promotion of ‘national feeling’ among the educated natives of Bengal. By “natives” of course, he meant, ‘Hindus’ as was the vogue in those days in Bengal, as indeed in other parts of the country. This becomes clear from the very first paragraph of his pamphlet, which set out the objectives of his society. Expressing concern with the indiscriminate mimesis of Western modes by the educated Hindus, he stressed the need for an effort to see that the entire Hindu heritage was not lost. With this end, the “Nationality Promotion Society”, as Bose called the proposed organization, was to seek to revive the national gymnastic exercises, establish schools for instructions in “Hindu Music” and “Hindu-medicine”, encourage the cultivation of Sanskrit and ‘mother-tongue’ before the instructions in English, oppose the trend to mix English words with those in Bengali in common parlance, eventually make it obligatory for its members to correspond among themselves in Bengali, and its maximum use in meetings and associations along with the preferences for Indian forms of etiquette. The main objective of the society would be “to promote and foster national feelings which would lead to the formation of a national character and thereby to the eventual promotion of the prosperity of the nation.
In the same queue following Bose is Nebagopal Mitra, editor of the ‘National Paper’ and a member of the Brahmo Samaj and upholding more or less similar views. In 1867, Mitra started an annual gathering, called Jatiya Mela, which became famous later as the ‘Hindu Mela’, with a view to promote national feeling, sense of patriotism and a spirit of self-help among the Hindus. The main items in the programme of these gatherings were the singing of patriotic songs, speeches by distinguished persons, gymnastic displays and exhibitions of Indian arts and crafts. As Sushobhan Sarkar has remarked, “These annual meetings stirred up all Calcutta.”

When some critics questioned the use of the word ‘national’ for the society as misplaced when its membership was confined to the Hindus only, the National Paper in its issue of 4 December 1872, replied that the Hindus certainly formed a nation by themselves and as such a society established by them can very properly be called a National Society.

As other organizations emerged in Calcutta in due course, the Hindu Mela ceased to meet after 1880 and not much was heard of the ‘National Association’ either. But some persons of repute continued to uphold the view, in Bengal, even after the foundation of the Indian National Congress, that while the latter be supported, Hindus, since they formed a nation by themselves, must also have their own political organization. But this vacuum continued in Indian history until probably “Hindu Mahasabha” was formed at Hardwar in 1915, although “Hindu nationalism” got its manifestation in the independent charismatic leaderships of Lal, Bal and Pal, but neither of them tried to institutionalize “Hindu nationalism” outside Congress to any great effect.

Efforts at institutionalizing Hinduism in a political format were not confined to Bengal only, but a series of such organizations cropped up simultaneously at various parts of the country, a ‘Hindu Sabha’ for instance, was founded in Madras in 1881. Punjab in particular witnessed a chain of such organizations. In the same sequence, some Hindus in Lahore founded the Lahore Hindu Sabha in 1882 for protecting the so-called Hindu interests. By the summer of 1908, there were “Hindu Sabhas” in each of the districts of Punjab and at their head stood the “Punjab Hindu Sabha”. It was the latter’s initiative, which led to the foundation of the “All India Hindu Mahasabha” at Hardwar in 1915. Although not a large organization, the Mahasabha’s role in expressing or molding general Hindu opinion on communal issues could not be completely ignored.

For over two decades several Hindu leaders of the Congress attended the annual sessions of the Mahasabha without necessarily subscribing fully to its ideology or programme. Such association continued till 1937 when it was formally banned by the Congress. Some Congress leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Madan Mohan Malaviya even presided over the sessions of the Mahasabha. Even those Congress leaders who kept themselves generally aloof from the Mahasabha occasionally tried to influence its decisions and extend the hold of their supporters over it. This was resented by the Muslims in particular from Congress in view of the fact that the Mahasabha adopted an openly partisan attitude on the issue of Hindu-Muslim riots and strongly supported the Suddhi and Sangathan movements in the twenties.
Where Savarkar Takes Over:

The elections of 1937 marked the emergence of the Congress as a powerful Parliamentary organization as well as a mass-based party, completely eclipsing the Hindu sectional organizations like the Mahasabha, but instead of being discouraged, the latter under the leadership of the ex-revolutionary, V.D. Savarkar, now acquired a much more strident tone, basing itself openly on Hindu nationalism and strongly opposing any concession to Muslims at the cost of what he called ‘Hindu interests’. Thus at the annual session of the Mahasabha at Ahmedabad in 1937, Savarkar declared in course of his Presidential address that Hindus were “bound and marked out as a nation by themselves”, and that all the various tests of nationhood such as country, race, religion and language entitled the Hindus to claim nationhood by themselves much more than many other nations. The Mahasabha, he further claimed, was pre-eminently a national body representing the Hindu nation as a whole. Obviously referring to Hindus and Muslims, he observed that these were “two antagonistic nations living side by side in India and their antagonism is not likely to end soon”. He called ‘Hindu-Muslim unity’ a myth and it would not any purpose. The only wise thing to do was, he suggested, to make it clear that Muslims would have the same rights as other Indians, but no special privileges. If on this basis they were prepared to join the Hindus in the struggle for freedom, they would be welcome. Savarkar, however, felt that because of their religious fanaticism and ‘pan-Islamic’ tendencies, Muslims were not likely to work with Hindus. Hindus must therefore, he asserted, “look to themselves and stand on their own legs and fight single-handed as best as they can for the liberation of India from any non-Hindu yoke, be it English or Muslim or otherwise”.

Thus was the “two-nation” theory elucidated from the rostrum of the Hindu Mahasabha, seven years after Iqbal had expounded it from the rostrum of the Muslim League, but about three years before Jinnah publicly adopted it and made it the basis for the Muslim League’s demand for India’s partition. Savarkar expounded the ideology of Hindu-nationalism with much greater force and at much grater length than ever before in his Presidential address at the next annual conference of the Hindu Mahasabha at Nagpur in 1938. Tracing the history of India since time immemorial, he asserted that “ever since the Vedic ages for some five thousand years at least in the past, our forefathers had been shaping the formation of our people into a religious, racial, cultural and political unit. No other nation in the world, excepting perhaps the Chinese, can claim a continuity of life and growth unbroken as our ‘Hindu-nation’ does. The ‘Hindu-nation’ is not a mushroom growth. It is not a ‘treaty-nation’. It is not a paper-mode toy. It was not made to order. It is not an outlandish makeshift. It has grown out of this soil and has its roots struck deep and wide in it. It is not a fiction invented to despite the Moslems or anybody in the world. But it is a fact so stupendous and solid as the Himalayas…that borders our North”.

Citing examples from modern European history, Savarkar pointed out that “a common territorial unit, a common habitat cannot by itself weld peoples differing in religions, racial, cultural and such other affinities into a national unit. It is not only a political fact, but a human one that religious, racial, cultural, linguistic or historical affinities make men
feel more akin to each other than the only fact of their residing in a common habitat unless that is an addition to those common ties. The Hindus should, therefore, not be running after the mirage of a ‘territorial Indian nation’ and seeking in that process to kill an ‘organic Hindu nation’. Instead they should resume the thread of their national life where their forefathers had left them at the fall of the Maratha and Sikh empires. Hindustan was the land of the Hindus and it was the Hindu nation which owned it. If you all regard it as an Indian nation, it is merely an English synonym for the Hindu nation. To us Hindus, Hindustan and India mean one and the same thing. We are Indians because we are Hindus and vice-versa”.

This is how Savarkar identified Hindus with a nation like Germans, whereas Muslims with a community like Jews. He affirmed conclusively that the Hindus would be ever ready to grant equal rights and representation to all minorities in India in various walks of life, but no special privileges over and above that enjoyed by the majority. The minorities would also be free to pursue their own religions and cultures, provided they bear undivided loyalty to the Indian state and the Indian state alone.

The Pinnacle of Hindu Nationalism:

Hindu-nationalism had begun to mount its pinnacle from the mid 1920s and the credit for this goes to none other than Keshav Baliram Hedgewar who founded Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1925 and he remained its supreme leader till he passed away in 1940. The R.S.S. took on several features of the Indian terrorist societies, including a military style of training recruits and a keen political religiosity. From its inception, the basic unit of the R.S.S has been the ‘shakha’ (local branch), which in the beginning had a close affinity to the akharas. The term ‘akhara’ designates a place where the young men of a locality gather daily for bodybuilding, exercise and sports. In this guise the akhara retains a ritual dimension. It includes a temple, generally dedicated to Hanuman; it is placed under the authority of a guru who instructs the members of the akhara in physical and mental discipline, giving them a certain balance. Members of an akhara are recruited from all social milieus and develop a strong collective attachment to it.

Before this model was reinterpreted by the R.S.S, many nationalists had derived inspiration from it both ideologically and organizationally. The clearest such case was that of the Bengal Secret Societies, with which Hedgewar was quite familiar. These organizations often practiced martial exercises with a religious overtone which found particular language in the initiation ceremony; the members of the Anushilan Samiti took an oath of allegiance to the organization before an image of Kali, with the ‘Bhagavad-Gita’ in one hand and a revolver in the other, the presence of the goddess serving as a reminder that movement drew its ethics of violence partly from the ritual of the shakta sect. But the R.S.S was distinguished from the traditional model by their ideological character and style of physical exercise. Physical training and wrestling among individuals gave way to games between opposing teams. For Joseph Alter, the Sakha’s physical training is “unambiguously Western” because even “stave training and other
kinds of Indian exercise are regimented according to Western standards of cadence, formation and discipline.22

V.M. Sirsikar, who joined the R.S.S in 1933 at Nagpur, mentions that the ‘Sunday Parade’ was accompanied by a band playing English music (the orders for the drill were in English) and most of its practices had been borrowed from the University of Training Corps. In the sakhas of the R.S.S, as in the first political akharas or in the terrorist societies, participants trained in drill with the lathi and played team games such as Kabaddi. Members (Swayamsevaks) were selected in small numbers from among the youths attending the shakha. They then pledged to consecrate themselves to the R.S.S ‘with their whole body, heart and money for in it lies the betterment of Hindus and the country’. Hedgewar, the founder of R.S.S, was raised to the status of a god so much so that from 1927 he subjected his young recruits to weekly sessions of ideological education consisting of simple questions to the novices concerning the Hindu nation, its history and heroes especially Shivaji. The first public task assigned to the R.S.S by its founder included a religious element in so far as it was to protect pilgrims against the rapacity of Muslim fakirs and Brahmin priests at the great festival of Ramanavami held at Ramtek (near Nagpur) in 1926. However, its dominant mission was undoubtedly directed against Muslims, as the events of 1927 in Nagpur revealed, wherein the R.S.S volunteers were involved in a riot during the procession of Mahalakshmi.

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, designated by Hedgewar as his successor shortly before his death in 1940, was unquestionably regarded as a “guru” by members of the R.S.S. In his book, he tried to establish that Hindustan is the land of the Hindus and the ‘terra firma’ for the Hindu nation alone to flourish upon. He proceeds later, “There are only two courses open to the foreign elements either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so and to quit the country at the sweet will of the national race. That is the only sound view on the minorities’ problem. That is the only logical and correct solution. That alone keeps the national life healthy and undisturbed. That alone keeps the nation safe from the danger of a cancer developing into its body politic of the creation of a state within the state. From this standpoint, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture i.e. of the Hindu nation, and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizens’ rights.”23

An Exegetic overview:

In the background above-mentioned, we can reflect upon the circumstances right from the mid nineteenth century that created the fertile ground for the “Hindu-nationalism” to prosper and which culminated in the writings and movements of Savarkar and Golwalkar. From 1920s onwards, this movement began to spread ceaselessly in the most mechanical
and institutionalized form. In the face of the Gandhian secular/tolerant establishments, militant Hinduism was able to maintain its separate identity and mobilize its forces by re-creating its own ethnic cultural army from among the middle-class Hindu youths. Unlike the Congress leadership, ‘Hindu-nationalists’ rejected English ideas to import from and instead derived from the German brand of racial and ethnic pride to be used as a means to actualize their chauvinist goals. Any academic enquiry into the causation of the rise of ‘Hindu-nationalism’ in the colonial era would impel one to venture not only into the age of ‘British imperialism’ and the industrial-cum-educational transformation which Indian society underwent into this period but also into the pre-colonial primordialism of what the ‘Hindu-nationalist’ called “Islamic imperialism”.

Addressing the larger question first, as to when comes the stage into the civilisational march of a primordial community wherein ‘cultural nationalism’ begins to allure the educated middle-class youths of the given community? And that what impels these youths to pursue and pick up any of the ethno-centric identities to evoke nationalism and meet with the pre-determined nationalist goals even at the expense of harmonized social-cohesiveness and international peace? Lastly why did ‘cultural nationalism’ of India, unlike its counterparts in Germany and Italy, fail so remarkably to dissociate itself from religion or for that matter, even failed to bring in any radical reforms within the unjust and inegalitarian structures of “Hinduism”, nay, even maintained a perpetual indifference conspicuously towards the social movements led by lower-caste reformers?

Any academic rigor to respond to these questions would indisputably lead one into the keen study of both the primordial Hindu pedagogy and Western modernity, as the genesis of ‘political Hinduism’ was nothing more than a byproduct of some abstruse blending of these two elements. Responding to the first question, especially with reference to India, it can be argued that the role of “modernity” (introduced by the British imperialism) as a catalyst in the transformation of Indian society must be given primacy over any primordial component in order to produce the “national consciousness” among the middle-class Hindu youths right from the mid nineteenth century. The paradoxical character of the term “cultural nationalism” is structured in such a way that an apparent dichotomy between ‘culture’ (a primordial entity) and ‘nationalism’ (a modern entity) results into an eventual congruence between the same. But this consequentially-obscure-congruence between culture and nationalism should not be misread, ignoring the imperative midwifery role of the ‘industrial-revolution fraught with the modern epistemology’ to the effect that it is primordial “culture” per se, which is pregnant with nationalism; in fact it is strictly vice versa. Applying the same theory to the ‘cultural-nationalism’ of India, it could be validated that it was the Western-modernity-led-epistemology which enabled the educated Hindu youths to evoke “culturalism” and play ‘cultural-nationalist’ politics and never vice versa. Without this element of “modernity” being instilled into the Indian society, the civilisational march of Indian community would have surely been (and this argument shares no affinity with Orientalist School of thought) ad infinitum suspended.

With reference to the second and third question, it is inevitable to vindicate that any effort to examine into the complications of the genesis of ‘Hindu-nationalism’ would induce
one not to keep completely remote from the ethno-cultural specificities of ‘Hindu community’ and its historic interactive treatment towards its own “people on the fringe” or what Homi K. Bhabha calls “liminality” as well as towards other communities and ‘Islam’ in particular. Once equipped with Western education and blazing with national consciousness, the educated Hindus not only began to look back into their haphazard ‘history of invasions’ but also to rearrange, re-read, and rectify it in order to base their ethnic movement upon it and simultaneously to reinstate the ‘lost-ethnic-pride’. Having accomplished the task of “History correction”, they fell back upon two conclusions – (a) To identify “Muslims” as an alien aggressor and therefore an historical and domestic enemy apart from the English (without this “othering” of an alien community no cultural-nationalism can dream to move forward into the corridors of Power), (b) To maintain a constant indifference towards any radical reforms in the unjust social structures of ‘Hindu-society’.

It is not difficult to see through their strategic socio-political engineering as the obvious reason behind inventing “Muslims” as national enemy was simply that “Muslims” were the first and only group of foreign invaders (barring Europeans) ridden with a distinct and most organized theocratic ‘counter-culture’ which refused to bow to and assimilate with the Brahminical culture of India as a result of which the prescriptive ‘Hindu-ruling-elites’ remained thrown ‘out-of-Power’ for centuries; thus they remained the perennial victims of two-fold deprivations – material as well as pedagogical. Hence, this ‘historically-accumulated-frustrations’ of the Brahminical ruling-elites began to manifest itself into the forms of “Cultural-nationalism” and particularly into the projection of “Muslims” as the greatest national enemy. Besides there is another aspect of this “othering” also which is very nicely put forth by Bhikhu Parekh in his article “Discourses on National Identity”. To quote him, “Difference is made the basis of the 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. When so defined, the preoccupation with national identity leads to paradoxes and is ultimately self-defeating. Since 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.”24 In the same fashion, it is equally effortless to rumble the Hindu nationalists in their indifference towards social-reforms; one explanation of this could be that upper caste educated youths who were playing Hindu-nationalists had enjoyed a prescriptive social-status just by virtue of “birth” for thousands of years which they never wanted to lose only for a philanthropic reconfiguration of the social structures, even ignoring which they were quite confident to win the Power and materialize their dreams. This feeling of a “born Aristocrat” or having belonged to a powerful minority (Patricians) rather than to the wretched masses (Plebeians) was, first and foremost, the reason which prevented the upper-caste ‘Hindu nationalists’ from co-operating with the lower-caste social reformers in initiating the substantial reforms. But the most significant point to be marked over here is that this is where “cultural-nationalism” in India got contaminated with dishonesty and duplicity which this movement was never able to dispense with. And most remarkably this is where “Hindu nationalists” left sufficient space (never to be filled up again) for “Dalit-nationalism” to come up and occupy it justifiably. To add to the cunningness of ‘Hindu
nationalist’ movement, it did not simply base itself upon “Brahminical Hinduism” but notably introduced a racial category as well (the whole myth of Aryan superiority) to further alienate the Dravidians of South India and thus giving way to “Dravidian nationalism”. Lastly, on the question of the failure of Indian version of ‘cultural-nationalism’ to dissociate itself from religion or to go all-pagan like its German counterpart, it can be asserted that any response to this involves a variety of elements even outside this culturalist movement also like (a) Transient history of modernization and industrialization in India quite unlike Europe where intellectual atheism prevailed right from the 18th century Enlightenment period culminating into the late 19th century wherein the ideologues of both extreme Right and extreme Left, for instance, both Nietzsche and Marx, were the apologists of atheism. (b) Much like Jews in Israel, India happened to be the sole centre of ‘Hindu civilization’, (c) Reluctance of the upper caste youths to renounce their prescribed social status as renouncing ‘religion’ amounts to renouncing social status.

This, in sum, was a pejorative overview of cultural or Hindu nationalism in India. But in spite of all the drawbacks that this movement had, it can not be negated that this movement has always managed leave an impact upon Indian political scenario of both colonial and post-colonial ages and any effort to comprehend Indian politics would remain far from completion without taking into account the mysterious trajectory of “Hindu nationalism”. Irrespective of their political ideology and the strategic tools it resorted to meet its goals, what also counts is the fact that it has been appealing to the chunks of the masses and by the end of the 20th century also managed to become the single largest party of India bypassing Congress and thus form a coalition government. But there is no denying the fact that in the post-cold war era of globalization, ‘Hindu-nationalism’, like all other ideologies, has also undergone a remarkable modification but still its dilution does not signify its end.

(b) Political Nationalism:

Unlike Western Europe, “political nationalism” in India did not precede cultural nationalism, but it emerged much later. In true sense of the word, even pre-Gandhian Congress cannot be accredited with having caused “political nationalism” to be born; in fact, it was only with the arrival of Gandhi at the national arena that ‘political nationalism’ began to take a proper shape. It goes without saying that nationalism of pre-Gandhian Congress remained oscillating between “Cultural” and “Political”(as it appears in the debates and tirades of Tilak, Gokhle and Ranade) until Gandhi comes to take over and this is primarily why it would not be an exaggeration to entitle Gandhi as the ‘father’ of “political nationalism” in India. Further, in my typology of nationalism, I have chosen to split the “political nationalism” into two separate categories – (a) Congress Nationalism, and (b) Dalit Nationalism. The underlying principle behind the bifurcation of “political nationalism” and in particular, the inclusion of “Dalit Nationalism” into this category, is simply that “Dalit Nationalism” like any other ‘mainstream nationalism’ has a “pan-India” character and above all, it has persistently managed to refrain from any
whateover, secessionist tendencies. Thus by all yardsticks, “Dalit nationalism” gets qualified to be called “political nationalism” in as much as “Congress nationalism” is qualified to be the same.

(1) Congress Nationalism (Civic-territorial nationalism): India Is a Different Nation!

In order to comprehend not only ‘political nationalism’ but any political phenomenon, ideology, or structural-functionalism in India, we are both academically and pragmatically compelled to go through “Congress” which has been, since colonial times, not just an institution or political party but, as Rajni Kothari affirms, a “System” or an “Umbrella Party” or to use a Hobbesian phrase a “Leviathan within a Leviathan”. This gigantic image of “Congress” has not certainly been painted by the mendicant academicians and journalists but emanated from the “popular will and movements”. If Indian State is to be analysed in terms of ‘having effectively translated political-nationalism into popular nationalism’, it is mainly because Congress was able not only to have fathered it but also to have virtually ruled not just India but Indians right from the 1920s onward. It was this “Rule by Consent” that led the post-independence “Congress-nationalism” to be entitled as “Official-nationalism”. Any justifiable appraisal of Congress-led ‘political nationalism’ would confer this much of acknowledgment on it, in spite of all the valid criticisms Congress was subjected to by the intellectuals of all the camps. Apart from all this, there is another generalization which could validly be made against ‘Congress nationalism’ that most of the adherents of this loosely-drawn ideology took pain to vindicate the larger Centrist vision that India was a ‘different nation’ or more dexterously – a “different civilization”.

Congress as a Gandhian Protégé:

As mentioned above, any attempt to reflect upon the genesis of ‘political nationalism’ in India would pay little attention to the pre-Gandhian phase of Congress and instead deliberate upon the connecting thread between Gandhi and Congress-led ‘political nationalism’. It would not be an overstatement to assert that Gandhian phase of Congress was able, for the first time in Indian history, to invent realistically a “nation and nationalism” out of a variegated geographical entity. Before this, every anticolonial movement of resistance had been confined to parochialism and was noteworthy in its fiasco to connect to the other parts of India and therefore to invent an Indian nation. The apocalyptic arrival of Gandhi, at this historic juncture, at the national platform enabled Congress to grow up and mature as a Gandhian protégé. At this point, Congress and Gandhi were mutually inseparable and synonymous with each other to the effect that achievements of one became the achievements of another; but this relationship between Gandhi and Congress was of-course that of between “the Maker”(Gandhi) and “the Made”(Congress). Thus it was under the unparalleled statesmanship of Gandhi that
Congress became the progenitor of ‘political nationalism’ and the galvanizer of the idle masses in India. But despite all Gandhian influence, Congress was able to tactically transcend Gandhian ideology especially after ‘Independence’ but the process of making a constant disagreement with Gandhi by Congressmen had started only from the resurgence of socialists (CSP) within the ranks of Congress from 1930s onward. Thus ‘Congress nationalism’ includes not only the nationalism of Gandhi but also that of the “Socialists” like Bose, Nehru and others in the Congress.

Congress-Nationalism – Phase I (Gandhian Phase of Nationalism):

Although this by itself is debatable whether the very idea of “nationalism”, being itself a byproduct of ‘Modernity’, could in any way be related to Gandhi who was profoundly a non-modern, if not anti-modern. But one thing which is sure is that Gandhi appears anti-Western and pre-modern and he also appears to nurture a civilizational pride based on primitive values. One of Gandhi’s earliest works, “Hind Swaraj” (1908) is reflective of two things which Gandhi evolves in his later life – his political nationalism and his ‘Rousseau-like’ return to the Community and “bliss of noble savages” and primitive simplicity fraught with pride. But unlike Rousseau, Gandhi’s return to the Community was not mere theoretical but he led the masses after him up to the hills. It was this rare blend of popular statesmanship and utopian theorization which go into the making of the political nationalism of Gandhi. Although no academically water-tight political philosophy emanated from Gandhi, his Weberian charisma and ‘philosopher-king’ like persona was accountable to move the hibernated masses into action and thus enable the culturally-cleft Indian communities to invent an organic nation resting on the principles of political nationalism. This might be one of the reasons why Gramsci in one of his stray remarks on India, holds that “India’s political struggle against the English...knows three forms of war; war of movement, war of position and underground warfare. Gandhi’s passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a war of movement, and at others underground warfare.”

Applying partially the Gramscian paraphernalia to the Indian colonial state of affairs, Partha Chatterjee breaks up the presumed unity of nationalist thought into three stages or moments. He calls these, respectively, the moment of departure, manoeuvre and arrival. He argues that for nationalist thought to attain its paradigmatic form, these three are necessary ideological moments. The moment of departure lies in the encounter of a nationalist consciousness with the framework of knowledge created by post-Enlightenment rationalist thought. It produces the awareness – and acceptance – of an essential cultural difference between East and West. Modern European culture, it seemed to the apologists of this stage, possesses attributes which make the European culturally equipped for power and progress, while such attributes are lacking in the ‘traditional’ cultures of the East, thus dooming those countries to poverty and subjection. But the nationalist’s claim was that this backwardness was not a character which was historically immutable: it could be transformed by the nation acting collectively, by adopting all those modern attributes of European culture. But on being questioned if this would not
obliterate those very differences which marked the national culture as something distinct from Western culture, the nationalists of this ‘moment of departure’ would contend that the superiority of the West lay in the materiality of its culture, exemplified by its science, technology and love of progress. But the East is superior in the spiritual aspect of culture. True modernity for the non-European nations would lie in combining the superior material qualities of Western cultures with the spiritual greatness of the East. Partha illustrates this moment in the formation of nationalist thought by a study of the writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, an early nationalist thinker. But this moment of departure as described by Partha Chatterjee is not much of our concern at this stage as almost all nationalists of this moment, including Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay ended up plunging into cultural nationalism which is already dealt with.

But the next moment of manoeuvre, as Partha calls it, is significant to us in the light of the political nationalism of Gandhi. He argues that popular consciousness, steeped in centuries of superstition and irrational folk religion, can hardly be expected to adopt the high ideal put forward by the cultural nationalists and to actualize this ideal it would have to be transformed from without. And this is where, to Partha, the central political-ideological dilemma of capitalist transformation occurs in a colonial country, whose solution is passive revolution. It requires the mobilization of the popular elements in the cause of an anticolonial struggle and, at the same time, a distancing of those elements from the structure of the state. This is achieved, according to Partha, at the moment of manoeuvre, a crucial moment with many contradictory possibilities. It combines in one inseparable process elements of both ‘war of movement’ and ‘war of position’. It consists in the historical consolidation of the ‘national’ by decrying the ‘modern’, the preparation for expanded capitalist production by resort to an ideology of anti-capitalism – in other words, ‘the development of the thesis by incorporating a part of the antithesis’. Partha illustrates this moment in the course of a discussion of the thought of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

The last of the moments i.e. the moment of arrival, is when nationalist thought attains its fullest development. It is now a discourse of order, of the rational organization of power. Here the discourse is not only conducted in a single, consistent, unambiguous voice, it also succeeds in glossing over all earlier contradictions, divergences and differences and incorporating, within the body of a unified discourse, every aspect and stage in the history of its formation. This ideological unity of nationalist thought it seeks to actualize in the unified life of the state. Nationalist discourse at its moment of arrival is passive revolution uttering its own life-history. Partha illustrates this final point in the argument with a study of the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Coming back to the nationalist maneuvering of Gandhism, Partha Chatterjee believes that it would be a gross error to regard Gandhi as merely another ‘peasant intellectual’; despite the inherently ‘peasant-communal’ character of its critique of civil society, the correct perspective for understanding the Gandhian ideology as a whole would be to study it in relation to the historical development of elite-nationalist thought in India. For Gandhism was an ideology conceived as an intervention in the elite-nationalist discourse of the time and was formed and shaped by the experiences of a specifically national
movement. It is only by looking at it in that historical context that it becomes possible to understand the unique achievement of Gandhism: its ability to open up the possibility for achieving perhaps the most important historical task for a successful national revolution in a country like India, viz., the political appropriation of the subaltern classes by a bourgeois aspiring for hegemony in the new nation-state. In the Indian case, the largest popular element of the nation was the peasantry. And it was the Gandhian ideology which opened up the historical possibility for its appropriation into the evolving political structures of the Indian state.

To substantiate the political nationalism of Gandhi, it is ineluctable to invoke the political employment of ahimsa by Gandhi. It was possible for it to be regarded as a valid political theory even without its religious core. To quote Gandhi on this, “Ahimsa with me is a creed, the breath of life. But it is never as a creed that I placed it before India or, for that matter, before anyone except in casual or informal talks. I placed it before the Congress as a political weapon, to be employed for the solution of practical problems.” Partha Chatterjee would argue that while considering questions of Zamindari, capitalism etc., Gandhism would inevitably slip into the familiar thematic of nationalist thought. It would argue in terms of categories such as capitalism, socialism, law, citizenship, private property, individual rights, and struggle to fit its formless utopia into the conceptual grid of post-Enlightenment social-scientific thought. However, Gandhi rarely used the term ‘nation’ except in some of his debates with Jinnah. R.S. Yadav in one of his articles, “Nationalism”, notes that in one of his debates distinguishing between nation and state, Gandhi affirms that ‘nation’ is a meaningful combination of individuals, each with a distinct potentiality of his own to fulfil a common mission, whereas, ‘state’ is a mechanical arrangement super-imposed on a nation. For Gandhi, nation stands for creativity and vitality, while state is an archetype of convention and conservation. He wants to make sure that the social potentiality of nationhood should not be overshadowed by an overwhelming concern of the state. In this context, Bhikhu Parekh has rightly observed that when he occasionally used the term ‘nationalism’ he largely meant ‘love of one’s country’. For the most part he preferred ideas of collective pride, ancestral loyalty, mutual responsibility and intellectual and moral openness.

A Trope of Civilization:

The trope of ‘civilization’ is to political nationalism what ‘uni-culturalism’ and ‘ethnocentrism’ is to cultural nationalism. This is one of the murkiest ways to manifest one’s political nationalism in a liberal-democracy which seeks to homogenize the nation on the secularized principles of multi-culturalism and most importantly, it does so without invoking any intra-national xenophobic othering. Apart from this they remain very selective and alarmingly cautious while practicing civilizational trope. In India, both the variants of Congress nationalism – Gandhian and Liberal Socialists – were the unparalleled votaries of ‘civilizational analogy’ with feigned value-neutrality. Apart from Gandhi and ‘Congress-Socialists’, there was another noteworthy political-nationalist of the same period who was neither Gandhian nor a Congress-Socialist but a patriot of his
own kind – it was none other than Rabindranath Tagore – whose nationalism, of late, has attracted the attention of many a noted political scientists like Ashis Nandy (The Illegitimacy of Nationalism), Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj and so on.

Although the efforts of Gandhi and Tagore to transcend modernity and its ideological fallout like nationalism is commendable, but they need to be contested as the concrete outcome emanating from these efforts seems to be not only a chauvinistic return to primordialism and perennialism but also a sophist-like rejection of universality of problems, solutions and discourses. Gandhi’s insistence, that the East in general, and India in particular, must have its own Eastern and Indian solutions to its problem and should not look towards West for any thing, makes an exact antithesis to the Orientalist theory of Whiteman’s burden (The East cannot represent itself, it needs to be represented by the West, [See Edward Said, Orientalism]). Tagore’s emphasis on federalism, non-alignment, unity-in-diversity, and polyglot state unquestionably makes him, unlike Gandhi, an insider to modernity (Ashis Nandy’s term for Tagore) but the theoretical vagueness prevails as soon as he departs from modernity either in his rejection of ‘political history’ or in order to build up a ‘government by civilization’ or for that matter a passionate emphasis on primacy of handloom over power loom. The term ‘civilization’ has been time and again juxtaposed with ‘nation’ since Tagore and Gandhi to Ashis Nandy and so on but the cloud of mystery still shrouds over the convertibility of the term ‘civilization’ into an alternative form of modern or post-modern governance, which is not the case with the congruence of nationalism and modern institutionalized form governance (subject to one’s will to appreciate or denounce it). But the obscurantism embodied in ‘civilization’ does not seem to allow enough space for a rigorous academic engagement unless it is further deconstructed into more precise terms like political, social or cultural historiography or for that matter perennial continuity of oral traditions of a community or the blend of all in one.

Political Nationalism of Tagore:

The significance of Tagore’s contribution to political nationalism could be measured, amongst others, only from the claims made by Humayun Kabir that the principles of non-alignment and federalism were Tagore’s contributions to Indian foreign policy and the Indian Constitution, respectively.30 He was the first great Indian, according to Kabir, who defied the Eurocentrism introduced by colonialism into India and revived India’s ancient ties with Asia and Africa. As for federalism, Kabir says, it was Tagore who had first declared, towards the beginning of the 20th century, that “if God had so wished, he could have made all Indians speak one language… the unity of India has been and shall always be a unity in diversity.”31

But Ashis Nandy believes that neither non-alignment nor federalism were solely Tagore’s contribution to the culture of Indian politics. Both principles have been supported by Indian traditions, by a galaxy of influential anti-imperialist Indian political thinkers, and by the process of participatory politics in a multi-ethnic society. But few gave non-
alignment and federalism greater legitimacy than Tagore did within the modern sector, for not even Gandhi could ram down the throat of the Indian literati his particular awareness of Indian traditions as Tagore did. Nandy establishes that any modern Indian who claims that nationalism and the principles of the nation-state are universal has to take, willy nilly, a position against both Gandhi and Tagore and this goes in spite of the fact that Gandhi was an outsider to modern India, Tagore an insider.

In his brief, well-argued book “Nationalism”, Tagore distinguishes between government by kings and races (his term for civilization) and government by nations (his term for nation-states). He believes that ‘government by the Nation is neither British nor anything else; it is an applied science. It is universal, impersonal and for that reason completely effective.’ Tagore observes that the difference between the ‘government by civilization’ and the ‘government by nation-state’ is like the difference between the hand-loom and power-loom. In the products of the handloom the magic of man’s living fingers finds its expression, and its hum harmonizes with the music of life; but the power-loom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production. Tagore admits that India’s former governments were ‘woefully lacking in many advantages of the modern governments’. However, they were not nation-states – ‘their texture was loosely woven, leaving gaps through which our own life sent its threads and imposed its designs.’

Tagore recognizes that the standard advice to India will be: ‘Form yourself into a nation, and resist this encroachment of the Nation.’ He rejects the advice because it assumes that human salvation lies in the ‘dead rhythm of wheels and counterwheels’ and on ‘mutual protection, based on a conspiracy of fear’. Instead, he looks back to what he sees as the real tradition of India, which is to work for ‘an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them, and yet seek some basis of unity.’ The basis for this tradition has been built in India at the social level, not the political, through saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, and others. It is this solution – unity through acknowledgement of differences – that India has to offer to the world. It is here that Sudipta Kaviraj has also noticed Tagore ruling out political history and firmly establishing that ‘political history’ is not the means by which the secrets of Indian history can be revealed.

Tagore was disappointed with the educated Indian trying to absorb some lessons from history contrary to the lessons of their ancestors. To Tagore, it was part of a larger problem: ‘the entire East was attempting to take into itself a history, which was not the outcome of its own living.’ India, he believed, would have to pause and think before buying the more dazzling, transient products of contemporary history and paying for them by selling its own inheritance. He declared in his later life that he was against the general idea of all nations, for nationalism had become a great menace.
Political Nationalism in Gandhi:

Both Partha Chatterjee and Ashis Nandy acknowledge that Gandhi and Tagore together recognized the need for a ‘national ideology of India’ as a means of cultural survival and both recognized that for the same reason, India would either have to make a break with the post-medieval Western concept of nationalism or give the concept a new content. As a result, for Tagore, nationalism itself became gradually illegitimate; for Gandhi, nationalism began to include a critique of nationalism. It is for sure that neither of them wanted their society to be caught in a situation where the idea of the Indian nation would supersede that of the Indian civilization, and where the actual ways of life of Indians would be assessed solely in terms of the needs of an imaginary nation-state called India.38

Tagore in his response to modernity does not fully negate modernity and maintains successfully what might be called ‘quasi-modernity’, but Gandhi appears to depart from the whole area of “modernity”. Ashis Nandy, in his celebrated work “the intimate enemy”, tries to delineate that throughout the colonial age, indigenous Indian mind managed to retain its uncolonized and unsubjugated self and this uncolonized self was most systematically and representatively manifested in the persona of Gandhi. For instance, the most dominant principle in Gandhian praxis is non-violence. The principle of non-violence, argues Nandy, gives men access to protective maternity and by implication, to the godlike state of ardhnarisvara, a god half-man, half-woman. But given the cultural meaning of naritva, non-violence also gives men access to the powerful, active, maternal principle of the cosmos, magically protective and carrying the intimations of an oceanic and utopian beatitude. Along the same continuum, courage – what Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph call Gandhi’s new courage39 – allows one to rise above cowardice or kapurusatva and become a ‘man’, on the way to becoming the authentic man who admits his drive to become both sexes. In sum, Gandhi was clear in his mind that activism and courage could be liberated from aggressiveness and recognized as perfectly compatible with womanhood, particularly maternity. Nandy is convinced that Gandhian view of courage not only negates the native Ksatriya worldview but also negates the very basis of the modern colonial culture; as the colonial culture depended heavily on Western cosmology, with its built-in fears about losing potency through the loss of activism and the ability to be violent. Gandhi’s reply to the colonial homology between childhood and political subjugation was indirect. He rejected history and affirmed the primacy of myths over historical chronicles. He thereby circumvented the unilinear pathway from primitivism to modernity, and from political immaturity to political adulthood, which the ideology of colonialism would have the subject society and the ‘child races’ walk. This was Gandhi’s way of grappling with what Nandy would call ‘colonial racism’.40

There was a direct component in Gandhi’s defiance of the ideology of adulthood, but it was relatively trivial. Not only did every Westerner and Westernized Indian who came in touch with Gandhi refer at least once to his child’s smile, his admirers and detractors dutifully found him childlike and childish respectively. His ‘infantile’ obstinacy and tendency to tease, his ‘immature’ attacks on the modern world and its props, his ‘juvenile’ food fads and symbols like the spinning wheel – all were viewed as planks of a
political platform which defied conventional ideas of adulthood. Many social-psychologists interpret these infantile symbols of the leader of the East as regressive outcome of the generations of subjection. Ashis Nandy, however, differs from this interpretation and emphasizes on the other part of the story where a specific political position became in Gandhi a point of convergence between immediate social needs and metaphysical defiance. To be precise, Nandy concludes arguing that Gandhi not only challenged, in his own Eastern style, the entire West in their understanding of ‘child-adult relationship’, history-myth dichotomy, and the whole modernity but also regarded the Western oppressors as the victims of their own paradigm, in need of emancipation.

Thus it can be concluded that the nature of political nationalism had donned a civilizational wear in Gandhi and this civilizational trope made Gandhi reject the very idea of ‘political nationalism’, rationalism, scientism, historicism and everything which he thought was modern. By calling Parliament, ‘a sterile woman and prostitute’, he rejected the very idea of ‘liberal democracy’ and eventually of “state” in favor of a regional self-administration. Let me quote Gandhi from his discussion with students wherein his civilizational trope seems to be at its pinnacle: “Let us not be obsessed with catchwords and seductive slogans imported from the West. Have we not our own distinct Eastern traditions? Are we not capable of finding our own solution to the question of capital and labor...? Let us study our eastern institutions in that spirit of scientific inquiry and we shall evolve a truer socialism and a truer communism than the world has yet dreamed of. It is surely wrong to presume that Western socialism or communism is the last word on the question of mass poverty.”

The political expediency or usefulness in the sense of ‘need of hour’ against the imperialist authority of the above-mentioned citation of Gandhi cannot be negated but as far as its universality across the time and space is concerned, it can validly be contested. Surprisingly, even Ashis Nandy, in his urge to produce an Eastern-style anti-West response to colonialism by Gandhi, goes too far to celebrate the civilizational victory of the oriental Gandhi against the occidental imperialism of western civilization. As Amartya Sen also notes, “In asking the question as to whether Indian history indicates that such internal divisiveness is inescapable in India, the point could certainly be honestly made that there was no such basis for expecting perpetual hostility between different religions or divisive regions. For this it was not necessary at all to claim that a tendency towards unity and a broad synthesizing priority are very special characteristics of Indian culture – not to be much found elsewhere” (Amartya Sen, On Interpreting India’s Past, in “Nationalism, Democracy and Development” (ed) by Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, 1997, 20).

Congress-Nationalism – Phase II (Socialist Nationalism):

From late 1920s and specifically from 1930s, a chunk of high-spirited youths, educated in Europe and America and electrified with the Western ideology of “Socialism”, came back to join Congress with a radically new programme. These socialists were more or
less disillusioned with the Gandhian methodology of anti-colonialism and chose instead to break with the modus operandi of conventional politics of Congress. These socialists were brimming with the ambitions of modernizing India on the Western Socialist or Fabian model of 'development' by setting aside the Gandhian utopia. By the late 1920s, J.L. Nehru and Subhash Bose emerged as two leading young socialists in Congress, ready to revolt against the Gandhian approach of politics. Both of them had a charisma which moved the youngsters in the Congress to arrive at the decision-making largely against the will of Gandhi, for instance, Gandhi had little say in the sloganeering of "Purna Swaraj", a decision taken at the Lahore session of Congress presided over by Nehru in 1929. In the same way, Bose was elected twice for the post of Congress President against the openly declared candidate of Gandhi. The overwhelming presence of the young socialists like Narendra Dev, Minoo Masani, Lohiya, and J.P. and so on, led to the establishment of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within Congress in 1934. As soon as India gets independence, these socialists get split into two groups – one group under the leadership of Nehru remains in the Congress to rule over the post-colonial India; while another group, mainly under Praja Socialist Party (PSP), sits in opposition in Parliament. These socialists alone could be given credit for translating 'Congress-nationalism' into 'official-nationalism' and thus for institutionalizing the political nationalism in India. The CSP from the beginning assigned itself the task of both transforming Congress from within and thus strengthening it. As per the task of transforming Congress, which was regarded as ideological task, Congressmen were to be gradually persuaded to adopt a socialist vision of independent India and a more radical pro-labor and pro-peasant stand on the contemporaneous economic issues. This ideological and programmatic transformation was, however, to be seen not as an event but as a process. As Jayaprakash Narayan repeatedly told his followers in 1934: "We are placing before the Congress a programme and we want the Congress to accept it. If the Congress does not accept it, we do not say we are going out of the Congress. If today we fail, tomorrow we will try, and if tomorrow we fail, we will try again."43

The impact of socialism could easily be seen in Congress from 1930 onwards. Congress, including its 'right-wing' was made to realize that the poverty and misery of Indian people was the outcome not only of colonial domination but also of the internal socio-economic structures of Indian society which requires inevitably a drastic transformation. The impact of socialism in Congress was also reflected in the resolution on 'fundamental rights' and 'economic policies', passed by the Karachi Session of the Congress in 1931; the resolutions on economic policies passed in Faizpur session in 1936, the setting up of a National Planning Committee in 1938 and above all, in the increasing shifts of Gandhi himself towards radical positions on economic and class issues.

Nehru, for instance, put his commitment to socialism in clear, unequivocal and passionate words in his Presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in April 1936, "I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in socialism and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense... I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social
structure…. That means the ending of private property, except, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative service.”

Nehru, at this juncture, developed a strained relationship with Gandhi. He criticized Gandhi for refusing to recognize the conflict of classes, for preaching harmony among the exploiters and the exploited and for putting forward the theory of trusteeship relying on the moral conversion of the landlords and capitalists to help the poor. In fact, Nehru devoted a whole chapter in his autobiography to gently combating some of the basic aspects of Gandhian ideology. As Nehru, himself, notes down that from the beginning, all the Congress socialists agreed upon four basic propositions: (a) that the primary struggle in India was the national struggle for freedom and that nationalism was a necessary stage on the way to socialism; (b) that socialists must work inside the National Congress because it was the primary body leading the national struggle; (c) that they must give the Congress and the national movement a socialist direction, and finally; (d) that to achieve this objective they must organize the workers and peasants in their class organizations, wage struggles for their economic demands and make them the social base of the national struggle.

Thus elaborating keenly upon the political nationalism of the Congress socialists in general, and Nehru in particular, Partha Chatterjee describes this phase of Indian nationalism as “the moment of arrival”. This is the third stage of nationalist thought wherein the consequences of the mobilization (i.e. of the Gandhian moment of Maneuvering) are appropriated within the ‘real’ domain of politics and direct control over the now reconstituted political process is resumed. Thus the critical point of Gandhism’s ideological intervention was pushed back, at this stage, into the zone of the ‘purely religious’ or the metaphysical; only its political consequences were ‘real’. To make it more lucid, Gandhi and his seemingly pre-modern weltanschauung was used by the modern bourgeoisie to serve its own ideological interests. Partha cites an interesting example to prove his point that it now became possible for J.L. Nehru, Prime Minister of India, to inaugurate on Gandhi’s birthday a new factory for making railway coaches and say, “I am quite sure that if it had been our good fortune to have Gandhiji with us today he would have been glad at the opening of this factory. People think that he was against machinery. I don’t think he was against it. He did not want machinery except in the context of the well-being of the mass of our people.” So Partha rightly argues that once the ‘Truth of Gandhism’ had been retrieved from the irrational trappings of its ‘language’, the possibilities were endless: it could justify everything that was progressive.

Similarly, Sunil Khilnani, in his celebrated work, “The Idea of India” makes note of the political nationalism of Nehru arguing that Nehru was attracted only by the political and economic examples of the modern West; he was far less taken by its cultural models. It was fundamental to him much like Gandhi and Tagore, that Indian nationalism could not fashion itself either after the Gallic version of a community of common citizenship or the volkisch idea of a shared ethnic or cultural origin. But unlike Tagore and Gandhi, for whom the state was a dispensable nuisance, Nehru believed that an Indian identity could
emerge only within the territorial and institutional frame of state, with a model committed
to protecting cultural and religious difference rather than imposing a uniform
‘Indianness’. Khilnani observes that Nehru’s ‘the Discovery of India’ is correctly read as
an expression of the nationalist imagination, but a highly unusual one, capacious,
accepting, and with no trace of a desire for purification or hardening of boundaries.47

Ambedkar’s Criticism of Congress Nationalism:

Amidst the criticisms of the political nationalism of Congress, Ambedkar’s criticism of it
deserves an early description for a variety of reasons. As Congress nationalism was split
into two phases, Gandhian and Socialist, Ambedkar’s criticism centered more upon
Gandhian phase of Congress nationalism than that of Socialist. Although in his celebrated
work “What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables”, Ambedkar has not
only tried to see through the real character of Gandhi, but also that of next leadership in
Command like Nehru and Patel. This treatise of Ambedkar happens actually to be a very
significant agency for a value-neutral research scholar to make an appraisal of the ‘civic
nationalism’ Congress claimed to practice. In this treatise, Ambedkar seems to be at pain
to establish, especially before foreigners, that neither Congress nor Gandhi are true
friends of untouchables and that both Gandhi and Congress represent only caste Hindus
and none else. Ambedkar asserts that all the high-handed claims of Congress to represent
almost all the minorities of India have been proved forged not only theoretically but quite
empirically, in particular, after the election of 1936-7, when Congress secured less than
fifty percent of the Whole seats. Ambedkar argues that with the emergence of Muslim
League and other religious minority organizations it has become clear, even to a foreign
eye, that Congress does not represent the other religious minorities and therefore any
religious minority and Muslims, in particular, could not be left to the tyranny of
communal Hindu majority. But as far as the case of ‘untouchables’ are concerned, both
Congress and Gandhi have been successfully able to beguile the foreigners into believing
that ‘Untouchables’ were inseparable parts of Hindus and they themselves are the
unparalleled leaders of this community. This does not mean that either Gandhi or
Congressmen want genuinely to guide the untouchables but, on the contrary, for their
selfish interests, they do not want to lose their slaves and share their cake with the so-
called ‘inferior people’. These foreigners are easily deceived by the Congress machinery
primarily because Congress, being the party of Brahmins and Bania, are the most
resourceful party to run a propaganda machine and it has virtually captured the Indian
media suppressing the alternative voices. Ambedkar holds that there is, in reality, no
difference between Gandhism and traditional Hinduism except that Gandhism builds up a
philosophical and moral defense for the conventional Hinduism. Ambedkar delineates
that Gandhi was one of the orthodox upholders of the ‘caste-system’ until 1922 and after
that he is adhered to the so-called ‘Varna-system’, which is no less rigid than the former.
Gandhi writes in a Gujarati journal “Navajivan” in 1921-22, “I believe that if Hindu
society is able to stand it is because it is founded on the caste-system. A community
which can create the caste-system must be said to possess unique power of organization.
The seeds of Swaraj are to be found in the caste-system. Different castes are like the
different sections of the military division. Each division is working for the good of the whole." 

After 1922, Gandhi departs from the orthodoxy of the caste-system in order only to become the apologist of “Varna-System”, with a little modification into it. The little concession Mr. Gandhi gives is that children of any Varna might study about the tasks assigned to another Varna but they can not be permitted to make an earning out of the professions allotted to other varnas, otherwise it will bring in a chaotic situation. Ambedkar regards the ‘Varna theory’ as the parent theory of ‘caste-system’. Gandhi also rejects “interdining” and “intermarriage” as insignificant means to bring in social solidarity. Ambedkar further shows his resentment against the governing class in Congress, arguing that whenever the servile classes ask for reservations in the Legislatures, Executive and Public Services, the governing class raises the cry of ‘nationalism-in-danger’. This governing class in Congress, contends Ambedkar, consisting of Brahmans and Bania, regards any constitutional safeguards for the weak and poor as a hurdle to nationalism and this is the way Congressmen have been misusing nationalism.

Thus Ambedkar questions the very foundational element which constitutes the political nationalism of Congress, i.e. the social-inclusiveness of Congress nationalism which Gandhian leadership, in particular, claimed to represent. Ambedkar has endeavored to prove that the hypocrisy of Congress nationalism pretending to be all-embracing and socially-inclusive needs to be exposed especially to the “untouchables” as well as foreigners. It is at this point that Ambedkar could be juxtaposed with Gandhi in relation to their respective contributions to the political nationalism of India. If Gandhi could be accredited with laying the foundation of political as well as popular nationalism, Ambedkar could be accredited with laying the foundation of an alternative political nationalism which, albeit, failed to be a popular nationalism but which was uniquely distinct not only for its pan-Indian character but much more for its dependence upon liminality or for the nationalism of the marginal people.

(ii) Difference-sensitive Nationalism: India Is Not a Nation!

The contemporary authors on Indian nationalism have found little time, with the exception of Aloysius and Kantha Illaiah, to exhibit the fragile linkages between the two most academically-debated terms “Dalit” and “Nationalism”. Although Aloysius comes very close to delineate that Dalits not only have had their own nationalist trajectory but that they alone were the representatives of ‘political nationalism’ in India; he refrains from using the term ‘Dalit nationalism’. But I have chosen to use the term for all the same reasons which could be invoked to classify “Hindus” will to make a nation” as ‘Hindu-nationalism’ or for that matter, “Congressmen’s will to make a nation” as ‘Congress nationalism’. The idea of “Difference-sensitive nationalism” does not gell nicely with the Kantha Illaiah’s idea of “Buffalo nationalism” which appears to be just an antithesis of “Hindu nationalism”, signifying that “Buffalo nationalism” seeks to exclude the Brahmans in so much as the “Hindu nationalism” seeks to exclude untouchables. But
Ambedkar’s nationalism – and let me take the liberty of calling it ‘Difference-sensitive nationalism’ – is not exclusive of Brahmins or what he calls the caste Hindus.

Ambedkar also needs to be distinguished from the social reformers of the lower caste preceding him as those preceding social reformers were confined to mere selective reforms in the oppressive structures of Hinduism while having no political foresight. The learned doctor himself affirms that the untouchables have been historically conscious about their forming a distinct nationality if not nationalism. Based on this presumption that the untouchables were a distinct nationality, Ambedkar postulates that just by the virtue of having been a historically marginalized nationality, untouchables must be recognized as having a minority status and hence be assured of constitutional safeguards against the communal majority of the caste Hindus. These safeguards in favor of untouchables should not be perceived with any antagonistic or anti-national spirit by the caste Hindus as this does not amount to any ‘secessionist-nationalist’ demand for a separate homeland. In this light, it goes without saying that every nationality, as Ambedkar also argues, is not destined to, nor does it have the “will” to form a nation or nationalism. But Ambedkar, as the representative of the untouchables, would never want them to remain deprived of this passionate ideology (nationalism) or what he calls “fellow-feeling”. In this respect, Ambedkar’s notion of nationalism (Difference-sensitive nationalism) goes hand in hand with Aloysius’ idea of nationalism without a nation in India.

To characterize Ambedkar’s nationalism which I have preferably called ‘Difference-sensitive nationalism’ requires further qualifications than simply naming it ‘political nationalism’ as it was remarkably different from the political nationalism of Congress which was merely of ‘civic-territorial’ nature with an emphasis on liberal-socialist doctrines. Whereas Ambedkar’s nationalism transcends Congress nationalism to become more socially-inclusive and difference-friendly and hence it also resembles what Seymour has called ‘socio-political nationalism’. Ambedkar’s nationalism is ‘socio-political’ in nature as it, respecting the value-pluralism of difference-based society, ensures affirmative action and preferential treatment by the state for the historically-oppressed groups and minorities in the society rather than simply gets away with ‘uniformity of treatment’ or the so-called formal equality and universal citizenship rights. Ambedkar’s ‘Difference-sensitive nationalism’ would therefore surpass civic-territorial nationalism of Congress, emphasizing more upon ‘equality of outcome’ rather than just upon ‘equality of chances’ which is based on ‘difference-blindness’.

But at the end of the day Ambedkar was a nationalist and unlike the contemporary radical Minoritarianists, Ambedkar would not renounce the very idea of nationalism and instead search for what Carlyle called ‘organic filaments’ in society and based on these filaments, he would lay the foundation of Indian nation which he himself confessed (quoting Disraeli) is work of art. This is chiefly why I believe Ambedkar’s nationalism would perfectly dovetail, within the paradigms of political nationalism, with what Seymour has called ‘socio-political nationalism’ in order to characterize ‘Quebecois nationalism’.
Ambedkar’s idea of nation and nationalism:

Defining nationality Ambedkar notes down that “nationality is a social feeling. It is 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 at once a feeling of fellowship for own kith and kin. 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 gradation 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.” So it can be deduced from this that Ambedkar sees nationalism as a force releasing the wave of mutual attachment towards each other and in the same breath, the feeling of anti-fellowship towards foreigners. To Ambedkar, nationalism is a subjective social feeling wherein the people of a group are suffused with the ‘consciousness of kind’. Any ethnic group in bonding with such consciousness can be said to constitute a nation and the absence of such subjective social feeling in a group can be regarded as the failure of nation-making or national existence in that group. To substantiate his idea of nationalism, Ambedkar puts forth a quotation from Renan as follows: “that race must not be confounded with nation. The truth is that there is no pure race. Racial facts, important as they are in the beginning, have a constant tendency to lose their importance. Human history is essentially different from Zoology.” Adding to the same further on linguistic aspect of nationalism, “Language invites re-union, it does not force it. The United States and England, Spanish America and Spain have same languages and do not form single nations. On the contrary, Switzerland which owes her stability to the fact that she was founded by the assent of her several parts count three or four languages. In man there is something superior to language – Will. The will of Switzerland to be united, in spite of the variety of her languages, is a much more important fact than similarity of language. often obtained by persecution.”

Ambedkar puts his belief in Renan’s approach to nationalism whereby he considers nation as a living soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which eventually to Renan are but one, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other in present. One is the common possession of a rich heritage of memories, the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to preserve worthily the undivided in inheritance, which has been handed down. Renan therefore proclaims that man never improvises and that the nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices and devotion. Ambedkar gets keen on distinguishing nationality from nationalism. To him they are two different psychological states of mind. Nationality means ‘consciousness of kind, awareness of the existence of that tie of kinship’. Nationalism means ‘the desire for a separate national existence for those who are bound by this tie of kinship’. But again he adds that there can not be nationalism without the feeling of nationality in existence. But it is important, emphasizes Ambedkar, to bear in mind that the converse is not always true. The feeling of nationality may be present and yet the feeling of nationalism may be quite absent. This is to say that nationality does not in all cases produce nationalism. For nationality to flame into nationalism two conditions must exist. First, there must arise “the will to live as a nation”. Nationalism is the
dynamic expression of that desire. Secondly, there must be a territory which nationalism could occupy and make it a state, as well as a cultural home of the nation. Without such a territory, nationalism (Ambedkar quotes Lord Acton’s phrase) would be “a soul as it were wandering in search of body in which to begin life over again and dies out finding none.”

A Debate on India is Not a Nation:

There has been an intense debate taking place time and again amongst the various schools of thought speaking both for and against the nation. Two prominent schools opposed to each other could be mentioned in this regard – the nationalist school and the subaltern school. The nationalist school has, ever since colonial times, maintained that Indian nationalism through various national movements has succeeded to produce a nation in India. Bipin Chandra, for instance, could be noted on this, “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 are 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.” In the same manner, subaltern school counter-argues that Indian nation has met with a historic failure to come to its own; or for that matter, the Indian bourgeoisie failed to speak for the nation.

Emphasizing on the negative character of Indian nationalism, Aloysius establishes that unlike West, Indian nationalism has remarkably failed to produce a nation for a number of reasons. He further holds that if the ideology and movement of nationalism meant an affirmation of the mass aspiration towards the nation – an equal socio-political community – as a minimum agenda, the phenomenon here was reactionary. While the historical conjuncture in the West favored a convergence between nation and nationalism, it did not do so in the subcontinent. Nationalism here largely diverged from the nation and advanced towards the formation of a state-system. Traditional dominance here formally transformed itself into state power without undergoing any substantial change. The modern European idiom of secularism, liberal democracy, nationalism etc. were all appropriated to assert what in substance turned out to be just an updated version of the same old principle of ascription. Thus he argues that the whole colonial drama, in more senses than usually conceded, is a continuity with the past rather than break with it.

Aloysius also rules out, any whatsoever, application of Gramscian model of “passive revolution” and “Hegemony” to the colonial national movements of India as false-consciousness. Gramscian hegemony, he argues, is solidly founded on economy and economic and political interests of the contending parties. When the nationalist
mobilization attempted to move the masses away from economic and political pursuits by delegitimizing them as imitations of the West, and to bring about a form of national unity based on religion and allied notions, it clearly revealed that the nationalists were taking a definite position of pro-status quo in economic and political matters, and the consequence was that such a political mobilization turned out to be false consciousness or camouflage for the masses whose political and economic interests were sought to be excluded. The Gramscian hegemonic process of building the national-popular is certainly not the process by which the masses are led into believing something that is not in fact there. Hegemony is a conscious and consensual political process for all the parties involved; it is a process of dovetailing the different interests in the realm first of economics, politics, then, and only then, of culture and superstructures. It is for the same reason that the highest form of Gramscian hegemony, moral and intellectual leadership by the leading class is not to be equated with the Gandhian call for moral reform. The former is a process by which the economic and political interests of different contending parties are unified and universalized into a new form of secular-national morality or popular religion. The latter, on the other hand, was a call to revert to the community-based morality of traditional Indian society with hierarchical ascription, denying the crucial role of the economy and politics as the universal arena of all individuals equally.

Here Aloysius makes his point that Indian nationalist political mobilization within its partiality and patchiness did give an appearance of the emergence of a national-popular will; the masses did appear on the scene, and they seemed to give their consent to the nationalist agenda; however since this consenting process was not built on the solid foundation of even the minimum social and political programme of the masses – the destruction of the old order of ascriptive inequality and acceptance of social citizenship, it was so ephemeral and momentary that it could not even bear the weight of Independence. And here Aloysius draws his inevitable conclusion that nationalism succeeded but the nation failed to emerge. Unlike the Gellner’s proposition, here the process of invention was displaced by one of prevention; when imagination is limited to a minority of the elite, it turns out, argues Aloysius, to be an illusion to the masses – the nation.37

(c) Secessionist Nationalism:

This is a kind of nationalism which, in spite of being universal in nature, remains the worst victim of the power-play in work by the nation-state system. It remains always on the fringe struggling against the state-machinery of ‘mainstream-nationalism’ which it chooses not be assimilate with. By virtue of being a historically distinct ethny and sociopolitical culture, the advocates of secessionist nationalism claim, on behalf of their society, a separate homeland or a sovereign state. Their claim for homeland does not remain unjustified for the simple reason that they not only constitute a nationality but this nationality is also fraught with the “will” to make a separate ‘nation-state’. In want of the required resources to match the might of the so-called “mainstream-nationalism”, the voices and concerns of this ‘dissent-group’ remain unheard and unattended even internationally on most of the occasions. In majority of the circumstances, this dissenting
nationalism is destined to go down into history as ‘failed nationalism’ or compromising ‘subnationalism’ as Engels also calls it “historically suppressed nationalism”. But every ‘mainstream-nationalism’ has a different nationalist-cum-expansionist perspective to look at the separatist claim and to serve this purpose, it not only develops but also inculcates into its people, an authoritatively different pedagogical vocabulary to address the spokespersons of the separatist claims. The proponents of this movement are not only accused of promoting ‘bad nationalism’ but also given names like terrorists, secessionists, separatists, and renegades and so on. It is only on a few occasions that the legitimacy of the secessionist claim is acknowledged by the ‘mainstream-nationalism’ and they get a chance to form a sovereign nation-state.

(1) Muslim Nationalism (Muslim-League Nationalism):

Muslim nationalism was uniquely different in its manifestation from the rest of nationalisms in India and only loosely fits into the category of secessionist nationalism. But for the lack of better word, it could be dovetailed with secessionist nationalism, as it could neither be called ‘cultural nationalism’ nor ‘political nationalism’. A dilemma with this nationalism is that it was part of Indian experience of nationalisms only up to pre-independence or colonial phase and not in the post-colonial phase. Faced with this dilemma, in spite of basing its nationalism upon “religion” and fulfilling most of the criteria of cultural nationalism, it can not be categorized as ‘cultural nationalism’ mainly because it did not choose to materialize its nationalist claim into the same sovereign state of India but instead asked for an alternative parallel-going sovereign state. For the same reason, it can not also be called ‘political nationalism’.

Muslim nationalism in India was represented by the Muslim League in the colonial age and thereafter in the post-colonial age Muslims as a religious group in India were reduced to a nationality without nationalism. Even Muslim League nationalism was relatively a late entrant in the race for nationalism; it began to take a concrete shape only from the late 1920s. But much before this, Muslims as a separate religious group began to undergo the influence of modernity only by late nineteenth century under the leadership of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. But it is generally believed that Muslim leadership was initially more concerned with the global “pan-Islamic movement” than Indian Independence movement. It is precisely from mid 1930s that Muslim leadership began to turn towards the nationalist demand for a separate homeland under such radical nationalists as M.A. Ansari, Jinnah, and Iqbal.

Ayesha Jalal notes that the famous resolution passed at the Muslim League’s Lahore session marked the transition of the Indian Muslims from a minority to a ‘nation’. One point of view, adds Ayesha Jalal, which needs putting to rest is that in declaring the Indian Muslims a ‘nation’, the League was inspired by a normative ideal in Muslim consciousness, namely that the preservation of the religious identity of the community, demanded the exercise of political power by representatives of the Faithful (Ayesha Jalal, ‘Exploding Communalism’ in ‘Nationalism, Democracy and Development’ (ed.) Bose
and Jalal, 1997, OUP, Delhi, 92). The statement of Muslim ‘nationhood’ which emanated from Lahore in March 1940 was, to quote one critic, ‘an extreme step for solving communal problems’ (Ayesha Jalal quotes Dr. Radha K. Mookerji, Ibid.). To Ayesha Jalal, an explicit revolt against minoritarianism, it was also an implicit coup against the dominant binary mode which extolled Congress’ ‘secular nationalism’ as legitimate and denigrated Muslim difference as illegitimate ‘religious communalism’. Declaring the Indian Muslims a ‘nation’, Jinnah confessed that the idea of being a minority had been around for so long that ‘we have got used to it … these settled notions are sometimes very difficult to remove’. But the time had come to unsettle the notion since ‘the word “Nationalist” has now become the play of conjurers in politics’ (Ayesha Jalal quotes Jinnah’s presidential address to the All-India Muslim League, Ibid.). Deliberating upon this, Jalal argues that in attempting to give territorial expression to the Muslim claim to nationhood, Jinnah and a mainly minority province based All-India Muslim League had to make large concessions to the autonomy and sovereignty of the majority provinces, not a very tidy beginning to the search for statehood. It was the veritable absence of an all India Muslim ‘communalism’ which had given rise to the claim for Muslim ‘nationhood’. This did not translate into a secessionist demand for a Muslim nation-state, but was intended as the building block for a confederal arrangement with the Hindu-Majority provinces, or Hindustan, at the subcontinental level (Ibid.). Ayesha Jalal concludes saying that Pakistan was not a result of separation in so much as that of purposeful exclusion by the Congress leadership which was keen on grasping the centralized apparatus of the colonial state and which was prepared neither to share power with the Muslim League at the all-India level nor accommodate Muslim majoritarian provincialism within a loose federal or confederal structure. It was ready instead to wield the partitioner’s axe – in concert one might add with the Hindu Mahasabha – to exclude both the League and the Muslim majority areas from the horizons of the secular Indian nation-state (Ibid.). Jalal emphasizes that the resort to Islam (for the Muslim League) was a mobilisational technique to generate momentum for a political movement seeking a substantial share of power for Muslims in independent India. And more importantly, Jalal notes, if the League’s politics lent a ‘communal’ coloring to the demand for a ‘Pakistan’ at the social base, there were Muslim groups opposed to its strategy who made an even greater play of Islam as a religious ideology.

Any academic endeavor to explore into the causation of the rise of Muslim-League nationalism would lead one to postulate that the presence of at least three factors into the colonial politics of India could be remarkably noted down which compelled the pan-Islamic movement to be translated into the nationalist movement for a separate homeland. First of them could be located into the colonial demographic configuration of the Indian subcontinent, according to which the Muslims constituted a sizable minority vis-à-vis the Hindu majority unlike the Christians, Parsis, Jains and so on. This kind of minority status of the Muslims was not likely to leave them into the state of politically apathy and instead, the gradual arrival of modernity suffused them with political aspirations which were bound to reflect politically on the national stage. Secondly, the rise of militant ‘Hindu nationalism’ from the mid-nineteenth century onwards was also destined to produce its antithesis in form of ‘Muslim nationalism’. This goes without saying that the Hindu nationalists were successfully able to produce ‘the tyranny of
majority’ leading to the minority fear psychosis into the minds of the educated middle-class Muslims which ultimately resulted into the Muslim-League nationalism. The third factor which caused ‘the Muslim-League nationalism’ to rise was the disillusionment of the ambitious leaders like Jinnah and Iqbal with the Congress nationalism.

If we seek to analyze the intricate structures of this secessionist movement, we tend to discover that Jinnah’s nationalism is much closer to and in fact, no different from Savarkar’s nationalism. Both of them invented a ‘two-nation theory’ to agitate and mobilize their respective communities to build up their separate nations as they believed firmly that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations and they can not co-exist under any circumstances. The only difference between the two were that while Jinnah’s nationalism succeeded to make it a popular nationalism culminating into the making of Pakistan; Savarkar’s nationalism failed to carry the masses after it at least during his life time. Ambedkar’s criticism of ‘Muslim-League nationalism’ is remarkable at this stage, as he critically notes down that there is as much differences between the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, as there are similarities based on the more or less equal exchange of the customary habits. But the point is which part to emphasize upon, if the Muslims emphasize on “similarities” they would not need a separate homeland in Pakistan and can happily stay in India as a nationality without nationalism with the constitutional safeguards guaranteed to them; whereas if they choose to emphasize on “differences”, they would look for a Pakistan on communal lines.

(2) Sikh Nationalism:

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a number of social and religious reform movements in Indian society. In the Punjab, the Hindu Arya Samaj had much in common with the Sikh reform movement of the Singh Sabhas. They shared a common concern with a need to revitalize their faith and safeguard it from the growing Christian missionary influences and even adopted the similar tactics. But the ‘Singh Sabha’ movement went much further than the other reformist campaigns. Led by a group of militant tat (true) Khalsa reformers, the Singh Sabha reformers reformed Sikh identity and drew sharp communal boundaries between the Sikhs and Hindus. In the face of accepted norms of Sikh orthodoxy, they asserted that being a Sikh was confined to the members of Khalsa only. Sikhs who did not observe the symbols of the Khalsa, though they might well revere the Sikh gurus and worship at Sikh shrines, were seen as apostates or Hindus.

Further, within the Khalsa brotherhood, the tat Khalsa reformers were enormously successful in building a spirit of internal solidarity and consciousness and thus of communal separatism. The twentieth century brought the devolution of power to Indians by the British colonial authorities. English educated Sikhs also along with the Hindus scrambled for posts in the newly formed provincial legislative bodies. For the Sikh nationalists, separatism from the Hindus became an issue in practical politics and they demanded recognitions of the Sikhs as an independent political entity. But as a separate community the Sikhs constituted only 13% of the Punjab and Sikh nationalists realized
that for them to be in a position to safeguard meaningfully the interests of their community, the Sikhs would have to have political representation way out of proportion to their members. Hindu nationalists for their part rejected the Sikh claims to separate representation on the ground that the Sikhs were Hindus.

When Sikh aspirations were not fulfilled, traditional Sikh leaders who had been tacit supporters of the colonial authorities, were challenged by a younger generation of educated Sikhs, who joined hands with nationalist politicians in anti-government agitation for greater Indian participation in the administration. This process of politicization among Sikhs gave birth to what would be called “Khalsa nationalism”. The growth of Sikh communal consciousness and separatism introduced another element into the demand for Gurudwara reform. The non-Khalsa Sikh managers of Sikh shrines did little to enforce strict Khalsa tenets and the militant Tat Khalsa reformers saw the presence of Hindu and non-Sikh practices in Sikh worship as another example of the depravation of these essential prerequisite for the development of a separate Sikh communal solidarity. By 1920, militant reformers had taken matter into their own hands and began the forcible takeover of Sikh shrines.

When the government attempted to enforce the law, a mass conflict between Sikh agitators and the authorities ensued. The conflict raged sporadically until 1925 when 30,000 Sikhs were arrested, 400 lost their lives and 2000 were wounded. The agitation culminated in 1925 with the adoption of legislation relating to the management and control of Sikh shrines in form of the Sikh Gurudwaras Act. It provided an institutional framework for Sikh communal consciousness and separatism from the Hindus, which continues to be valid till date. The agitation also saw the genesis of two Sikh organizations, a Central Committee for the management of Sikh shrines, the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) and its political and agitational wing, the Akali Dal which have continued to govern the directions of Sikh politics for generations. Since its inception, the Akali Dal’s domination of this body for such a long time and its association with the successful Sikh struggle for control over their shrines, have made it a formidable force in Sikh politics.

The demand for a separate homeland expedited in post-colonial years to the degree of Punjab terrorism and ‘operation Blue star’ leading to what they called the martyrdom of their militant leader Bhindrawale which in turn resulted into the assassination of Indian Prime minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi in October 1984 causing a Hindu-Sikh riot. Although moderates in Akali Dal offered a compromise with government and deserted the demand for Khalistan as well as agreed on the limited autonomy of Punjab and managed to form a government in Punjab on their own in 1985. This was how the secessionist nationalism of the Sikhs was contained and converted into a mere ‘subnationalism’.

(3) Tribal Nationalism:

This is also a universal category of nationalism which could be traced in most of the countries in the world and particularly in the Afro-Asian countries and therefore it also
exists in India in form of secessionist nationalism. Indian subcontinent has been inhabited by the dozens of autonomous tribes which have been cut off from the mainstream Hindu civilization many of which have been Hinduised and gradually assimilated into the mainstream nationalism by the institutionalized efforts of the Hindu nationalists over a period of time. But still quite many of them have either been Christianized or have chosen to remain pagan and a number of these tribes have persistently exhibited their secessionist tendencies and sought to launch an underground national liberation movement against the Government of India (GOI). Tribes with such secessionist tendencies could be seen to have settled down in North-Eastern part of India. Naga-nationalism, for instance, have been one of the pioneering secessionist nationalisms in India which refused to bow to the might of Indian state ever since 1946. And since then, there have happened many rounds of Indo-Naga Peace talks but nothing concrete came out of it except for the momentary ceasefires. Apart from the Naga-nationalism, there have been other tribal nationalist assertions like ‘Mizo-nationalism’, ‘Assamese-nationalism’ and so on which although have been gradually blunted by the Continuous efforts of GOI to contain and appease them.

**Left-Wing Nationalism:**

This section of the chapter does not purport to deal with the theoretical aspects of the communism involving Marx, Lenin or Stalin; on the contrary it will deal with how Indian experience of Communism has acted as the comprador ideology without trying to comprehend the Indian peculiarities of the situations. Communist Party in India first got established in 1920 by M.N.Roy in Tashkent but for a number of reasons it got reestablished in 1925. The Communist Party of India was soon to be the most powerful political organization outside Congress by the late 1920s. On the directions of Moscow, Communist Party of Britain sent Philip Sprat to guide the communist movement in India in December 1926. Philip was able to infuse a new life into the Party and helped majorly in increasing the number of Unions, held organized demonstrations, edited newspapers, instituted youth movements, initiated and conducted strikes and used all possible methods of propaganda, with the result that the number of Communist members reached high figure.

But the further activity of the Communist Party was cut short by the arrest of 31 members, including almost all the prominent leaders on 20 March, 1929. They were tried under what is known as Meerut Conspiracy Case. The effect of this case upon C.P.I was twofold. On the one hand, the prolonged trial of the Communist leaders from 1929 to 1933 gained for them wide empathy of the Indian nationalists like J.L.Nehru, Ansari and even Gandhi. On the other hand, the C.P.I suffered a heavy blow, at least for the time being by the sudden removal of almost all its prominent leaders. From 1928 to 1934, C.P.I deserted the moderate path and began to follow the ultra-leftist policies on the dictates of the Comintern. It declared Congress to be a bourgeois organization pursuing the interests of the capitalists under bourgeois leadership of Gandhi and Nehru. After the Communist leaders, convicted in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, were released; they tried
to reorganize the party and reinforce the Red Trade Union Congress. They called for a wide strike of all textile workers on 23rd April, 1934, and it received overwhelming response all over the country. The Government of India took alarm and the Communist Party, along with some dozen trade unions under their control, was declared illegal. The Communist Party soon after went completely underground.

They soon realized that the extreme left and anti-Congress views entertained by them had practically isolated them from the political life in India. The Communist High Command also realized this stalemate position and adopted altogether a new plan. It may be described as a policy of infiltration into the Congress, with a view to wrecking it from within. The first step in this direction was to make an alliance with the recently formed Congress Socialist Party. C.S.P. without any suspicion welcomed their proposal and formed a United Front. This United Front was not only a body for joint action on party basis, it also permitted individual communists to become members of the Congress Socialist Party and therefore also of the Indian National Congress. Thus Communist Party established its influence in the left wing of the Congress and having occupied high official position in the C.S.P as well as AICC, used the Congress organization for its own propaganda. At the Ramgarh session of the Congress (1940), the CPI issued a new statement of policy entitled “Proletarian Path”. They demanded that India should make revolutionary use of the ‘War Crisis’; the first step towards this objective, it declared, would be a political general strike in the major industries together with country-wide no-rent, no-tax action. Next, the national movement would enter a new and higher phase – the phase of armed insurrection. The principle features of this forthcoming struggle, as per the “Proletarian Path” would be “storming of military and police stations by armed bands of national militia in rural as well as urban areas, destruction of Government institutions, and actual offensive against the armed forces of the Government on the most extensive scale.” But this resolution was defeated in that session. As a first installment of this policy, the CPI organized a general strike in the textile mills in the Bombay area and 150,000 workers were involved at its peak. These pronouncements and activities led the government to take drastic actions against the CPI. They arrested 480 persons who were acknowledged as Communists. The CPI got disorganized and seriously crippled once again. But as soon as Soviet Russia was invaded by Germany in June 1941, and forced to align with the capitalist countries, the whole situation got a radical turn. And in this new situation, the CPI would support the ‘British war-effort’ calling it a people’s war.

Thus throughout the colonial period, Indian Communist Party kept changing its stand according to the directions of the Communist Fatherland – Soviet Union. As soon as
India gets independence, the CPI happens to revise its policies time and again to share Power in the Indian state. Soon in the post-colonial period, splits after splits took place in the Communist Party which resulted eventually into the two sections of the Communists — one section chose to give legitimacy to Parliamentary Democracy and was called “Official Left” [CPI, CPI (M), and later CPI (ML)]; while another section still regarded Parliament as a Pigsty and continued its Chinese style protracted armed-struggle against the state [PWG, MCC, etc.].

Ideological Contradictions of the Left-Wing Nationalism:

In my typology of Indian nationalism, I have chosen to bisect nationalism into ‘bourgeois’ and ‘communist’ primarily because all sorts of nationalisms falling within the broader category “Bourgeois Nationalism” never intend theoretically to transcend the frontiers of sovereign nation-state (barring the neo-liberal capitalist project of trans-national globalization and the post-modem school). While Marxian Communism is inherently and philanthropically international in nature, at least theoretically as Marx’s call for the working class of the world to unite knows no national boundaries as even the revolutionary-socialist- Proletarian-State of Marx would act arbitrarily in a class-biased manner and therefore Marx would wait ideally for the higher phase of Communism when the state would wither away and politics itself would meet with natural death in a classless society. Hence the term “Communist nationalism” invokes a theoretical self-contradiction but a practical reality in as much as ‘caste-in-Islam’ — a theoretical self-contradiction but empirical reality.

But when we come to examine the case of Communist Parties in India, we discover that the concept of “Communist nationalism” is validly applicable here at least in the post-colonial politics of the Parliamentary Left. Prof. Valerian Rodrigues rightly observes that “the avowal of national integrity has become a major plank in the discourse of the communist parties particularly in the last two decades. They offer a justifiable rationale: if national unity were undermined it would place in grave danger rights, democracy, public institutions and the livelihood of the masses. It would have a deleterious impact on mass institutions built over the years through popular struggles. But while arguing thus, they seem to forget that communists always see the nation as a contested terrain. In a way, their nation is always something to be constituted rather than one that already exists. However, the entrenchment of the Communist parties at the Union level has made the recognition of certain questions unacceptable to them. They do not want to interrogate the nationalism of the nation that they uphold.”60 This has been the general criticism of the Parliamentary Left in India but apart from this, even the communist movement of the colonial times as well as the post colonial Left in its entirety could also be subjected to the criticisms on substantial level like as Prof Rodrigues himself maintains that the inability of the Indian Communists to theoretically engage with substantial India-specific issues have led the Communist parties to embrace a formal territorial nationalism, which is vacuous and therefore, can easily collapse into a conception of homogenous cultural
nationalism, or be synonymous with a regime of rights and liberties making national identity superfluous.\[61\]

Conclusion:

Anderson rightly argues that any sharp and unequivocal distinction between Asian and European nationalism lacks all validity (New Left Review, May-June, 2001). In the present chapter I have tried to depict almost all the currents of nationalism which Indian subcontinent has undergone in the colonial age as well as the pre-independent and contemporary debates on Indian nationalism. As regards the theoretical linkages between universal theories of nationalism and Indian specific experience of nationalism, there are two mutually exclusive schools of thoughts existing: one is Eurocentric Orientalist school which maintains that nationalism has been the original creation of the western Europe and the East experienced nationalism only in a modular form and hence Indian nationalism is a derivative discourse. Secondly, there is Indian chauvinistic school which denies any linkages whatsoever between Indian nationalism and its western counterpart, thus giving the nationalist discourse an absolute autonomy.

The tension between these two discourses (a site of contestation between colonialist discourse and nationalist discourse) has beautifully been depicted by Partha Chatterjee in his celebrated piece “Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World”. It is out of this contested site, argues Chatterjee, that Nationalist Thought (of the East) managed not only to liberate itself from the universalist Colonialist Discourse but also maintained its distinctive relative autonomy. Elaborating upon the nature of this site consisting of the strained polarization between what Chatterjee calls thematic and problematic, he argues that the thematic refers to an epistemological as well as ethical system which provides a framework of elements and rules for establishing relations between elements; the problematic, on the other hand, consists of concrete statements about possibilities justified by reference to the thematic. The holistic idea of the relationship between thematic, which reflects the universal western rationalist theory, and problematic, which is broadly assumed to be inspired from the former, is that the problematic in spite of its influences form the thematic manages in its everyday political domain to sustain its cultural autonomy. It will also become evident, argues Chatterjee, that the problematic need not remain fixed and unchanging. As ‘historical conditions’ change, so are new political possibilities through out; the problematic undergoes a transformation within the same structure of discourse.\[62\]

Showing the dilemma and contradiction which an Eastern nationalism like Indian nationalism is faced with vis-à-vis universal western rationality, Partha Chatterjee argues that ‘Eastern’ type of nationalism, in its search, is accompanied by an effort to ‘re-equip’ the nation culturally, and to transform it. But it could not do so, adds Chatterjee, simply by imitating the alien culture, for then the nation would lose its distinctive identity. The search therefore was for a regeneration of the national culture, adapted to the requirements of progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness. The attempt, therefore, argues Chatterjee, is deeply contradictory: it is both imitative and hostile to the
model it imitates... It is imitative in that it accepts the value of the standards set by the alien culture. But it also involves a rejection: 'in fact, two rejections, both of them ambivalent: rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity'. This contradictory process is, therefore, deeply disturbing as well. Hence Partha Chatterjee concludes that Eastern nationalism (read Indian nationalism) is disturbed and ambivalent as the nationalisms of Herder and Mazzini were not.

Thus Partha Chatterjee proposes that taken together, in its dialectical unity, the problematic and the thematic will enable us to show how nationalism succeeds in producing a different discourse. The difference is marked, on the terrain of political-ideological discourse, by a political contest, a struggle for power, which nationalist thought must think about and set down in words. Its problematic forces it relentlessly to demarcate itself from the discourse of colonialism. Thus nationalist thinking is necessarily a struggle with an entire body of systemic knowledge, a struggle that is political at the same time as it is intellectual. Its politics impels it to open up that framework of knowledge which presumes to dominate it, to displace that framework, to subvert its authority, to challenge its morality. But this hardly implies that as a discourse of power, nationalist thought remains only a negative power; on the contrary, it is also a positive discourse which seeks to replace the structure of colonial power with a new order, that of national power.

Having dealt with the extent to which thematic and problematic get into conflict, Partha Chatterjee advances to show their complex association in a dialectical unity, suggesting that this process of mutual influence between the thematic and problematic of nationalist discourse – the periodic dissociations and coming together – could even produce at critical junctures a thoroughgoing critique of the thematic itself, points at which nationalist thought will seem to be on the verge of transcending itself.

De-obfuscating Indian Nationalism:

Partha Chatterjee has done all to obfuscate any understanding of Indian nationalism by constantly shifting his positions (constructing a position in the first breath and deconstructing the same in another), by evading any distinct definition of nationalism in terms of myth or reality, ideology or positive sociology or any third definitional fact or fiction, by speaking simultaneously for and against Marx/Gramsci, by distinguishing between Nationalist Thought and Nationalism and eventually by using the post-structural language in order to posit unnecessary, what-seems-to-be, chauvinistic pride in the inner-cultural-domain of indigenous/Eastern civilization (as if the intellectual entrenchment of difference between the West and East were to liberate the East substantially).

The project that we need to take up right now is look for the most sharpening tool required to purge not only Nationalist Discourse of its mystifying metaphysical elements and thus enabling the readers with a better perspectivist road to journey back into the
colonial past but also to purge those equally abstruse and self-contradictory critical interpretations of this Nationalist Discourse. One of such obscurant criticism of the Nationalist Discourse is offered by Partha Chatterjee, which desperately requires a corrective intervention in the mode of criticism of the criticism but not with view to build up a theoretical defense of Nationalist Discourse, on the contrary, to facilitate a more lucid re-reading of it.

My problem with Partha Chatterjee is not that he distinguishes between Colonialist Discourse and Nationalist Discourse providing the latter with greater relative autonomy, my problem also does not start when he regards both these discourses as a bourgeois discourse. The problem begins when (a) the domain of Nationalist Discourse, as created by Partha Chatterjee using the Gramscian methodology of “Three Moments”, excludes conspicuously a ‘Fourth Moment’ of colonial simultaneity – the Moment of ‘Difference-friendly nationalism’ championed by Ambedkar who was an equal participant in both realms of Nationalist Thought and Nationalist Politics along with Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Gandhi and Nehru; (b) the vocabulary of post-structuralism is used not only to criticize the universal claims of post-enlightenment liberal modernity but also simultaneously, to prove that inner-cultural domain of Nationalist Thought successfully kept from being colonized and it is in this domain that the most original components required to imagine a nation could be discovered (hence building up the criticism against Anderson’s hypothesis that the Eastern nationalism has a modular character and derivative discourse); (c) the same vocabulary of post-structuralism/postmodernity is used to arrive at Marxian/Gramscian conclusions about Indian nationalism and state (the reification of the “nation” in the body of the state becomes the means for constructing this hegemonic structure, and the extent of control over the new state apparatus becomes a precondition for further capitalist development.

Towards resolving the contradictions inherent in the Partha Chatterjee’s perspective of seeing anticolonial nationalism, it becomes ineluctable to demolish his first hypothesis that anti-colonial nationalism in India has some unilinar-inner-logic implicit in itself which would unfold in the fashion of Marxian historical materialism, for instance, into three successive moments of departure (Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay), Manoeuvre (M.K. Gandhi) and arrival (J.L. Nehru) respectively. Contrary to this, there was a simultaneous co-presence (more concretely from 1930s onward) of all these moments – Hindu/Muslim nationalism, Congress nationalism (Gandhian/Liberal Socialist Nationalism), Left-wing nationalism as well as Difference-friendly nationalism. Although each of these nationalisms did differ in terms of their date of origin and the Hindu nationalist discourse was of course first of all to register its birth. Secondly, with the exception of Left-wing nationalism, each of these nationalisms was equally bourgeois in its ideologies, movements and programmes or in its (to use Chatterjee’s dichotomy) thematic/problematic, inner/outer domain, home/world. My reading of bourgeois nationalism in India or its European counterpart suggests that each of them constructs a semiotic dichotomy of cultural/material in order to build up or reinforce national identity (see Bhikhu Parekh, Political Studies, 492-504, 1994). This becomes an imperative, to borrow Gellner’s phrase, for a bourgeois nationalism to take up selectively bits of low/folk cultures and transform them into a high culture so as to make their national folks
feel closer to this elitist imagination and give them the impression that they (bourgeois leadership) are speaking on their (masses) behalf. This, however, is not to refute the distinctions present in Western-political-nationalism and Eastern-cultural-nationalism, meaning, Western Europe used less of cultural and more of political elements while vice versa was true not only of anti-colonial nationalism but also of nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe (the cultural/inner domain of German Nazis and Italian Fascists being the highest embodiment of it). It is here that the conjectures of Partha Chatterjee stand refuted and falsified.

Another proposition Partha Chatterjee makes is that there is one dominant Nationalist Discourse in every phase of anti-colonial national struggle which is remains almost uncontested as it is not contested by any alternative rival nationalist discourse but only by some stray uninstitutionalised dissenting voices which the Nationalist Thought manages to appropriate. Linked to this proposition is another of his propositions that the inner domain of this Nationalist Discourse – which includes family, language, culture, and religion – is sovereign, independent and detached from any western influence and of course it is in this domain that creative, imagining and uncolonized Eastern subjectivity declared its autonomy from the colonialist Western hegemonic discourse.

Thus the culturally rich ‘inner domain’ as drawn by Partha Chatterjee becomes a site of Eastern chauvinistic pride which could be maintained (at least Chatterjee would like us to maintain) till date by both the proponents of Nationalist Discourse and its progressive critiques of the East with the equal vigor as the most befitting intellectual response to the pedagogic West and in particular the Orientalists. The first flaw in the above-mentioned proposition is that there was not one but a plurality of nationalist discourses against one colonial discourse. Each of these nationalist discourses was ideologically and strategically contesting against and collaborating with its own rival compatriots as also simultaneously against the colonialist discourse of Raj. Besides each of nationalist discourses had its own take on the dichotomy of inner/outer domain and under no circumstances, the political-ideological stance (on inner domain) of one anticolonial nationalism, for instance, Hindu nationalism, was subsumed theoretically with holistic consensus (as Chatterjee seems to cue) by, let us say, Gandhian nationalism. Or for that matter, the inner domain of Gandhian nationalism was also not subsumed by either Nehruvian nationalism or Left-wing nationalism and vice versa was equally true. Illustrating more upon this, the inner domain of Hindu nationalism was much more exclusively different from its counterparts in terms of its non-inclusion of the cultures, languages, identitarian subaltern masses and so on of religious/racial minorities as well as of marginal sections of Hinduism itself. Similarly, Gandhi divests everything of outer domain (economy, statecraft, science and technology) and ideologically puts them into inner domain, so the dichotomy of inner/outer domain itself is destroyed in the nationalist discourse of Gandhi. Besides, Gandhian ideological ensemble would also be inclusive of all those categories which Hindu nationalist discourse preferred to exclude and the same time exclusive of categories like Western-modern-rational thematic which the latter had included. In the same vein, Nehruvian socialist model of nationalist discourse had its own modern-rational characterization of inner/outer domain which discouraged religion itself in both private and public sphere and chose to lay the foundation of newly-born Indian
state on western secularism. And it is this secularist model of Nationalist Thought which got translated into the official nationalism of Indian state.

Likewise, Left-wing nationalism had also reductively rubbished both the inner cultural domain of Indian civilization and outer material domain of post-Enlightenment rationality as semi-feudal, despotically oriental and bourgeois domain respectively, in a desperate need of radical transformation. Thus to Left-wing nationalism, nationalist discourse per se, qua bourgeois domain, could instrumentally be constructed in the transition phase and employed against the colonialist discourse as a counterpoise. But as soon as thecolonialist discourse is baffled and overtaken, it becomes the immediate task of the working class and its intellectual vanguard to destroy this bourgeois domain in order to bypass into a more justiciable and egalitarian social domain.

Finally, Ambedkar’s political nationalism, which I have preferred to call “Difference-friendly” nationalism, identifies convincingly not only its difference from ‘Hindu/Muslim nationalism’ and Congress nationalism but also from ‘Left-wing nationalism’. Ambedkarite nationalist discourse, despite broadly falling into the confines of bourgeois domain, distances itself categorically (particularly in its projection of ‘inner-cultural domain’) from its political-ideological counterparts. This nationalism precisely claims to tear asunder the so far projected compact and self-proclaimed undifferentiated uniformity of the “inner-cultural domain” of Hindu nationalism and approaches downward to represent the ascriptively repressed voices of Eastern-oriental exploitative history. It separates the dominant ‘Hindu history’ from the subordinate ‘Dalit history’ and provides this repressed history (the everyday form of local resistances which James Scott calls “hidden transcripts”) with an ideological alternative of counter-historiography and by virtue of this it aspires to become a counter-hegemonic weapon of the weak.

After resolving its disputes with ‘Hindu nationalism’, Ambedkarite nationalist discourse furthers to contest Gandhian nationalism and in particular, its inner domain of cultural-spiritual ‘Home’. Having been granted the right of ‘the separate electorate’ for the untouchables, Ambedkar’s nationalist discourse successfully challenges the ideological-political hegemonic claims of Gandhi to be the sole representative of Dalits to secure a political victory in the Gandhian inner domain. Unlike Partha Chatterjee, I would argue that this political victory was not a phenomenon of ‘outer domain’ but on the contrary, of ‘inner domain’ as Gandhi eliminates ‘outer domain’ by unifying/merging religion and politics in both public as well as private domain or in other words by theoretically rejecting the whole Enlightenment thesis (statecraft, science, history, macro-economy, technology and so on). Ambedkar’s nationalism also contests the genuinity of Gandhian ideology on the question of caste and social inclusiveness. In addition to this, ‘Difference-friendly nationalism’, unlike Gandhi, does not destroy ‘outer domain’ and yet gives sufficient relative autonomy to the ‘inner domain’. In the same spirit, Ambedkar also contests the official nationalism of Nehru and ‘Left-wing nationalism’ in particular, their difference-blind ‘uniformity of treatment’ to the people on the margin and thus falling in the trap of Brahminism; as both of these ideologies ignored remarkably the identitarian question of ascriptive liminality.
In sum, my proposition is that there was no consensually undifferentiated nationalist discourse, as Partha Chatterjee would like us to believe, contesting colonialist discourse; instead, there were a host of nationalist discourses contesting and collaborating strategically with each other against the colonialist discourse. Secondly, I propose that every anticolonial nationalism had its own ideological perspective of inner/outer, cultural/material domain. This is to imply that every nationalist discourse, rather than only ‘Hindu-nationalism’ (or what Chatterjee calls ‘Moment of Departure’) had its own notion of how a ‘new nationalist woman/man/citizen’ should be like!

Thirdly, Nationalist Discourse was certainly a bourgeois discourse, but to call it “bourgeois” does not mean reducing all the creative subjective forces to a mere positive sociology. On the contrary, the very act of imagining the ideology of nationalism is unquestionably an artistic imagination but to reify this imagination into a national movement and thereafter construction of a modern state is something which requires even greater display of art with scientific precision. Indian nationalism(s), by virtue of this imagining art and its reification into national movement and post-colonial state, is not mere imitation of the western post-Enlightenment rationality or a derivative discourse. Nor its imagination, as Kedourie, Gellner or Anderson would argue, is colonized or predestined. But at the same time, this nationalistic imagination in India had to wait for the British capitalist infrastructure to be born or to base itself upon. The idea is that no nationalism could be born into the medievalist vacuum and it needs to be preconditioned by modernizational capitalist infrastructure. To put it more precisely, pre-colonial India was simply incapable of being pregnant with this subjective imagination, namely, nationalism.

Finally, my proposition is that even ‘colonialist discourse’ is not a uniformly water-tight discourse but could conveniently be bifurcated into two different discourses: one discourse could be called ‘epistemological discourse’ with a liberating element in it; while another discourse could be named ‘Orientalist-colonialist discourse’ with a reactionary element of racist-imperialist design. There is no denying the fact that these two different discourses produce, at some point, a bourgeoisfied unity in a common bourgeois domain but in spite of this unity, the separateness of the two cannot be outlawed. Evidently, it was witnessed that after decolonization, the image of ‘white man’s burden’ created by ‘Orientalist-colonialist discourse’ dies a natural death and yet the ‘epistemological discourse’ of the post-Enlightenment rationality remained very much alive and open-ended. To merge ‘epistemological discourse’ with ‘Orientalist-imperialist discourse’ (as Partha Chatterjee does) through the Western-Eastern discourse is to fall into the same racist grid of reversing Orientalism. As this merger would be synonymous with the most unjustifiable merger of the Orientalist perspective of Macaulay and the revolutionary perspective of Marx, in particular when the latter maintained that the British were the unconscious tool of progress in India. Besides the liberating elements of the post-Enlightenment rationality (propounded by Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant etc.) cannot be ruled out just because they belonged to the western tradition. Any ‘bourgeois discourse’ sans imperialist ambitions, for that matter, is fraught with a liberating element (Marx showed this in his writings on
bourgeois reformism) especially for emancipating the social formation from the feudal relations of production and patriarchal superstructures.

Using the thematic/problematic analogy of Partha Chatterjee in a different manner, it could be argued that even ‘colonialist discourse’, rather than only ‘nationalist discourse’ (as Chatterjee suggests), had its thematic (epistemological domain) and problematic (Orientalist-imperialist domain). With this view in mind, it could be established that even in the case of colonial countries like India, the thematic of ‘Western epistemological discourse’ did not shut its doors to the prospective intellectuals of the East even in the 19th c but it was of course pessimistic towards the East for all the pragmatic reasons as not a single ‘discourse-level’ contribution from the East was witnessed on record to the well established intellectual tradition of the West. We can not accuse the great champions of liberty like Marx and Mill, of ethnocentric, Eurocentric or Orientalist attitudes towards the East when they hold, in despair, that the East does not know how to represent itself and it needs to be represented.

Premised on this, it becomes inevitable at this juncture to establish the relationship, as it was, between the thematic/problematic of ‘nationalist discourse’ and thematic/problematic of ‘colonialist discourse’. My first assumption, on the way to establish this relationship, is that there was no inherent clash or tension between the thematic of ‘colonialist discourse’ and the thematic of ‘nationalist discourse’. The site of tension or the ‘war zone’ was confined to the “problematic” of both the discourses respectively. This can, very much, be witnessed into the projected ‘outer domain’ of the first-to-be-born child of the Nationalist Discourse, i.e. ‘Hindu nationalism’. Hindu nationalist discourse had agreeably legitimized the Western influence on its self-drawn ‘outer domain’ i.e. on the question of statecraft, economy, science, technology and so on. The same is true with the last-to-be-born child of Nationalist Discourse i.e. Nehruvian socialist-nationalist discourse which, openly revolting against Gandhian ‘inner domain’, established the post-Enlightenment rationality not only in the public sphere but also in the private sphere. The only seemingly aberration could be located into, what Partha Chatterjee calls, the Gandhian ‘Moment of Manoeuvre’ wherein the very idea of ‘outer domain’ is renounced. The dilemma of this moment was that this was the only mass-moving moment to have accredited, on its part, three nation-wide movements. Academicians have always had tough time identifying Gandhi with modernity and hence some attribute him with pre-modernity, others with modernity and still others (like Rudolph and Rudolph) with post-modernity. Some like Ashis Nandy go to an extremity to celebrate the so-called Eastern pride, namely, Gandhi against the Western-modern rationality. Nandy celebrates Gandhian woman-like androgyeny against Western-male-aggressiveness, his child-like smile against pathological gravity of the West, his infantile obstinacy, juvenile food fads and symbols like ‘spinning wheel’ against the European adult maturity and heavy machination, his belief in ‘myth’ against Western belief in ‘historical chronicles’ (See Ashis Nandy, the intimate enemy, 1983).

Nandy seems to read too much into Gandhi by trying to get ‘behind’ him wherein lies nothing. The space of Gandhi (his write-ups and acts together), let me argue without any post-structural connotations, needs to be ranged over rather than pierced; or to put it
differently, Gandhi should be looked at, rather than unnecessarily looked through as it
would make the ‘object itself’ look blurred, defeating the very purpose of looking. My
reading of Gandhi, however, does not share the argument with the post-structuralist
Roland Barthes’s concept of the birth of a reader, when he declares: “the birth of the
reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (See Roland Barthes, “The Death of
the Author”, 1968). Barthes insists upon the death of the “Author” rather than “author”
which implies that no author should be read beyond his work, for instance, by going into
his biography and so on. But my proposition is that Gandhi cannot be read fully only
through his write-ups but his real life-activities is equally important to comprehend him
and hence the reader has to be born into the ‘life’ rather than ‘death’ of the Author.

Coming back to examine the Gandhian moment of ‘Manoeuvre’, I propose that Gandhi,
in spite of his romantic and poetic return to nature and tradition, was very much an
inseparable part of modernity, in the same manner as Rousseau, in spite of his conscious
rejection of reason, science, art and sophistication, was an inseparable part of the Age of
Reason/post-Enlightenment rationality. Gandhi allowed, with or without his conscious
will, enough of space for modernity to stealthily creep in and prevail. It was his tacit
consent to modernity which prepared the legitimate ground for Nehruvian socialist
modernity to successfully take over the newly-liberated Indian state, and that too on the
basis of gross de-recognition of Gandhism. Gandhi ably carried off the Weberian element
of charismatic leadership which simultaneously used two different languages to address
two different kinds of audiences – (a) rural uneducated peasants and (b) educated urban
middle class and its westernized leadership.

In its simple-sounding rural vocabulary (of Bhajans like Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram...
etc., of engaging the peasants with spinning wheel and laghu kutir udyog and so on) and
its politico-spiritual symbolism, like Gandhi himself donning the semi-nude dhoti – a
traditional attire of peasants, Gandhian leadership had everything required to galvanize
the rural masses into a national movement. Similarly, Gandhi addressed the urban-based
educated middle-class and its westernized leadership by using a different rational lingo
through press articles and editorials, books and ideologizing. Gandhian leadership
engaged itself ideologically and intellectually with almost all of its contemporaneous
nationalist discourses as well as with the colonialist discourse and this is how it
established its control over decision-making process of Congress. Gandhism as an
ideology offers its rational-critical explanations for its rejection of other the then
prevailing ideologies and premised on this critique, builds up the defense mechanism of
its own position. This whole process of critical-dialogical inter-subjective engagement
process on the part of Gandhism is by all means a byproduct of modernity and by virtue
of this modernity-infected fallout; it can be asserted that pre-colonial Indian/Eastern
civilization was incapable of giving birth to Gandhian leadership. Apart from this, we
have enough of signifiers present in Gandhian politics which provide with the linkages
between Gandhism and modernity, for instance, Gandhi’s express interest in electoral
system and taking sides for his own candidate in the Presidential election of Congress
(Pattabhi against Bose) shows his tacit consent for party system in a democratic setup.
His bold claims for being the sole self-declared representative of untouchables in the
Round Table Conference suggests his tacit consent to representative democracy. His
declaration, on the eve of Partition, that India could be partitioned only on his dead body, suggests his belief in an integrated and sovereign Akhand Bharat. These signifiers have a different story to tell about a Modern Gandhi.

In the light of the above-mentioned interpretations of the Gandhian ‘moment of manoeuvre’, it can be affirmed that the ‘inner domain’ of Gandhi was a ‘pragmatic domain’ with its instrumentalist value, designed to suit best the need of the hour, i.e. to contest, in the best possible manner, against the problematic of the colonialist discourse. As it was self-evident in the colonial India from 1920 to 1947 that Gandhi, by means of his own ideology, almost single-handedly created the national mass-movements and his success in the mass-movement is also a story of gross failures of his contemporary nationalist ideologies in doing the same. This would also reveal the tacit mutual contract between Gandhism and Socialist-Liberals of Congress that Nehruvian western rationality would take over from where the Gandhian romance would give in. This tacit mutual contract between the two parties was so explicit in the bourgeois public sphere that there was almost no voice representing Gandhism (the only mass-moving ideology in the war for national independence) in the Constituent Assembly. This was something most bizarre and unprecedented in the world-history of state-formation. My hypothesis here is that the seeds of modern rationality were ever-present on the ideological site of Gandhism which germinated later in the form of ‘official nationalism’ of Nehru in the post-colonial India.

This can, therefore, be concluded that there was no sharp contestation, as Partha Chatterjee presumes, between the thematic of the ‘colonialist discourse’ and the thematic of the ‘nationalist discourse’. The real site of intense contestation was between the problematic of the former and the latter. Sudipta Kaviraj accepts this distinction considerably when he maintains that colonial state created two different discourses amidst others: (a) intellectual discourse (which was often full of self-doubt and criticism) and (b) popular mythic discourse (which was unself-critical, arrogant and aggressive).65 Further Kaviraj held that “By integrating society, introducing symmetric trends of social-hierarchy, enumerating society, familiarizing Indians with the theory of public power and democracy, placing before them the universality of reason and the great narratives of European nation-formation and introducing the skills of forming associations, this imperial discourse had also taught Indians how rationalism could be turned against the European colonizers themselves. The lessons of rationalism were learnt, unfortunately too well...”66 And yet, I would argue that the imagination of Indian nationalist discourse was not colonized and there was no loss, as such, of liberating element in the nationalist discourse. The greatest burden befallen on the ‘nationalist discourse’ was to convert the disparate congeries of the people into an Indian nation, to make it more conducive to the smooth transition of Indian society from semi-feudal repressive economy, inegalitarian social-hierarchy and pre-colonial monarchical political (dis)order into capitalist/Liberal socialist economy, legal-formal equality (with preferential treatment) and post-colonial bourgeois participatory democracy respectively. As to how much post-colonial Indian state could deliver (within bourgeois limits) is a subject of debate I would not enter into here. Considering the narrow size of the educated middle-class in the colonial India and the large unbridged gap between the western-educated leadership and the vast uneducated
masses, it indeed required the strength of huge subjective creativity to first create a national movement and then to reify the nationalist ideology into a delivering state. In spite of all the studied failures of post-colonial Indian state, it cannot be gainsaid that it has managed to broaden significantly the size of the urban middle-class, entrench political democracy and civil-society, and ensure preferential treatment to the disadvantaged sections and so forth. With this, I would conclude my task of de-obfuscating Indian nationalism (my debt to Partha Chatterjee) of its obscuring academic elements.


22. Ibid., 326-8.


31. Ibid., 125.


33. Ibid., 14.

34. Ibid., 18-19.


36. Tagore, Rabindranath – Ibid., 63-5.

37. Ibid., 66-7.


41. Ibid., 56.


45. Ibid., Vol.7, 180.


49. Ibid., Vol.9, 251-62.


51. Ibid., 33-4

52. Ibid., 34.

53. Ibid., 39.


57. Ibid., 223-25.


59. Ibid., 705-6.


61. Ibid., 245.


63. Ibid., 42.

64. Ibid., 43.


66. Ibid., 158.